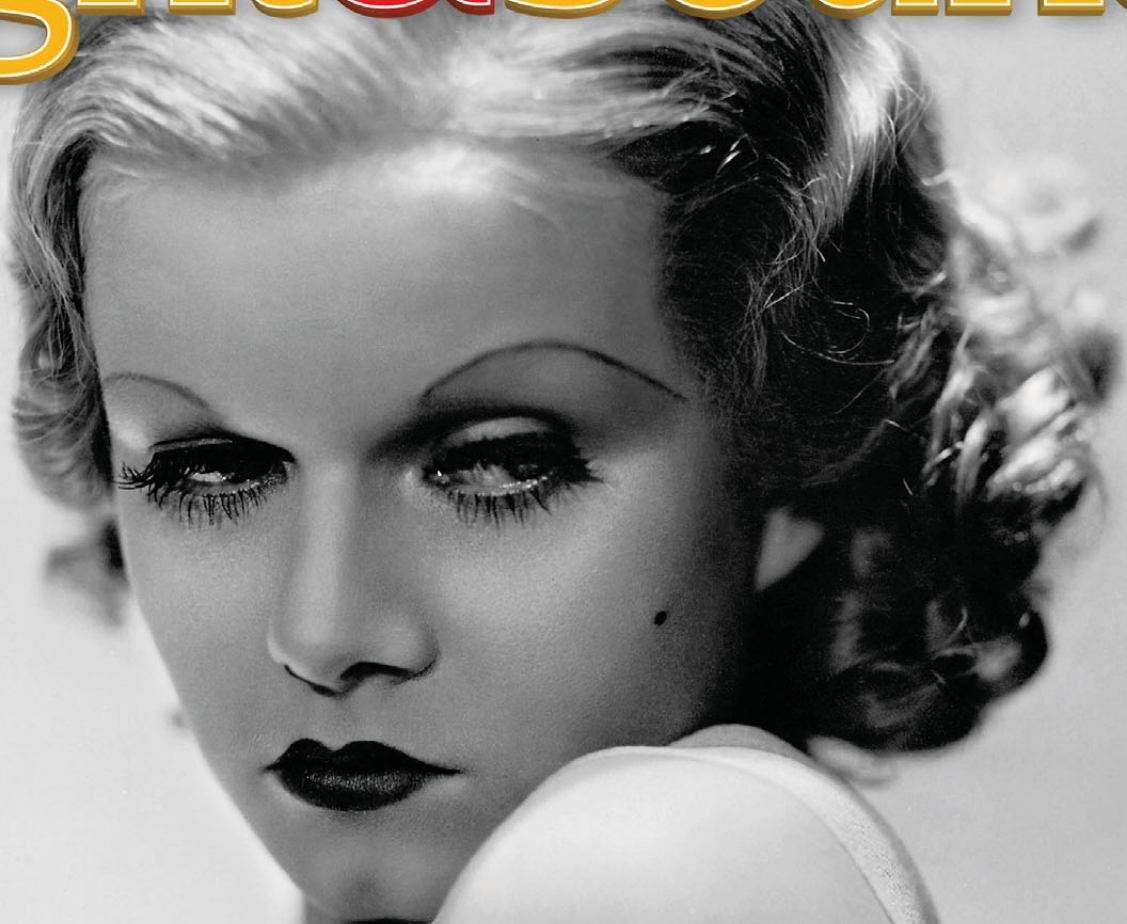


THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



HOLLYWOOD BEFORE THE CENSORS

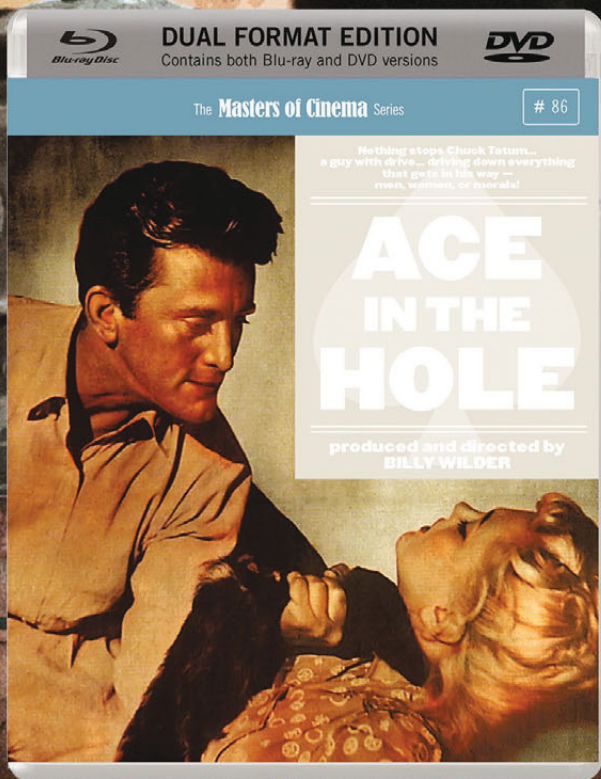
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30

God's lonely man

John Michael McDonagh discusses the influences behind *Calvary*, his tale of a priest living under the threat of death – from Melville and Bresson to *Home and Away*. By **Trevor Johnston**

REGULARS

5 **Editorial** Twitticism

Rushes

- 6 **Andrew Osmond** is thrilled by the resurrection of a classic animation
- 8 **Object Lesson:** **Hannah McGill** decodes the meaning of gloves in cinema
- 9 **The Five Key...** films about women in New York
- 10 **Interview:** **Catherine Bray** talks revenge with *Blue Ruin* director Jeremy Saulnier
- 13 **Dispatches...** **Mark Cousins** gets to grips with unclassifiable cinema

The Industry

- 14 **Development Tale:** **Charles Gant** follows *Tracks*
- 15 **The Numbers:** **Charles Gant** checks in to *The Grand Budapest Hotel*

- 16 **Brewster:** **Ben Roberts** considers Terence Davies and tax breaks
- 19 **Profile:** **Geoffrey Macnab** meets the man who put Flemish film on the map

Wide Angle

- 52 **Nina Power** sifts through the obsessions of Hito Steyerl
- 54 **Soundings:** **Daniel Barrow** listens closely to Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*
- 55 **Primal Screen:** **Bryony Dixon** finds silence is golden in Bo'ness in Scotland
- 56 **Isabel Stevens** digs the 'Extraction' theme at the AV Festival

III Letters

Endings

- 112 **Carmen Gray** on *Daisies*

FEATURES

20

COVER FEATURE:

Deep Focus: Pre-Code Hollywood

For a few short years at the beginning of the sound era before the censors clamped down, Hollywood portrayed America with an unprecedented frankness and realism. As our Deep Focus season opens at BFI Southbank, London, **Mike Mashon** sets out the historical context, **James Bell** samples the films, and **Dan Callahan** surveys the stars whose careers were made and lost

34

Forbidden fruit: the wild alchemy of Walerian Borowczyk

Eight years after his death, the visionary Polish director's perverse, confrontational narratives are ripe for reappraisal. By **David Thompson**

42

Punk's not dead

Lukas Moodysson has returned to the observant, upbeat charm of his early films with *We Are the Best!*, about a trio of young female misfits in Sweden in the early 1980s who decide to form a punk band. By **Ashley Clark**

46

THE S&S INTERVIEW: Jeremy Thomas

In the second half of an extensive career overview, the veteran producer talks to **Nick James** about his relationships with Nicolas Roeg, Bernardo Bertolucci and David Cronenberg, and why he has had to 'mutate or die' in order to continue working successfully in an increasingly conformist modern industry



20

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(incorporating Monthly Film Bulletin)
Published monthly by the BFI

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Volume 24 Issue 5 (NS)
ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

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COVER

Jean Harlow photographed by George Hurrell on the set of *Red-Headed Woman* (1932)
Image courtesy: BFI National Archive.
Retouched by DawkinsColour

NEXT ISSUE

on sale 6 May

Contents Reviews

FILMS OF THE MONTH

- 60 *Blue Ruin*
- 62 *Exhibition*
- 64 *Ilo Ilo*
- 66 *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears/L'Etrange Couleur des larmes de ton corps*

FILMS

- 68 *After the Night/Até ver a luz/Après la nuit*
- 69 *Almost Married*
- 69 *Calvary*
- 70 *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*
- 71 *Cupcakes*
- 71 *Dangerous Acts: Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus*
- 72 *Divergent*
- 73 *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker/Epizoda u zivotu beraca zeljeza*
- 74 *Escape from Planet Earth*
- 74 *The Informant/Gibraltár*
- 75 *The Invisible War*
- 75 *Ironclad 2: Battle for Blood*
- 76 *Khumba*
- 76 *The Last Day on Mars*
- 77 *Locke*
- 78 *Looking for Light: Jane Bown*
- 78 *The Love Punch*
- 79 *The Lunchbox*
- 79 *Magic Magic*
- 80 *The Motel Life*
- 82 *Muppets Most Wanted*
- 82 *Non-stop*
- 83 *Omar*
- 84 *Pioneer/Pionér*
- 84 *The Quiet Ones*
- 85 *The Raid 2: Berandal*
- 86 *The Sea*
- 88 *300: Rise of an Empire*
- 88 *Tracks*
- 89 *20 Feet from Stardom*
- 90 *Veronica Mars*
- 90 *We Are the Best!/Vi är bäst!*
- 92 *We Are the Freaks*
- 92 *Wrinkles/Arrugas*
- 93 *You & Me Forever*
- 94 *Yves Saint Laurent*

HOME CINEMA

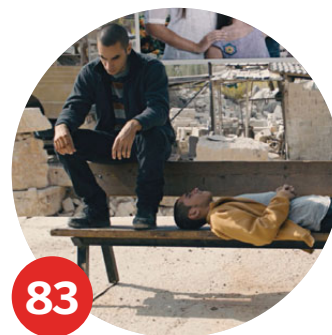
- 98 *Dead of Night, The Ealing Studios Collection Volume 1, Foreign Correspondent, Man in the Dark, Many Wars Ago, Phantom of the Paradise, Roma, Seven Samurai, This Is Not a Dream*
- DVD features**
- 96 **Edward Lawrenson** celebrates Bill Forsyth's early teen dreams
- 99 **Michael Brooke** revisits the unclassifiable Elio Petri
- 100 **Kim Newman** breathes life into two TV versions of *Frankenstein*
- Television**
- 102 *Jack the Ripper, The Mistress, Nichols*

BOOKS

- 104 **Nick James** enjoys Sally Potter's manual on directing actors
- 105 **Ben Walters** joins a chorus of approval for Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls*
- 106 **Nick Pinkerton** takes to the floor with a major biography of Bob Fosse



62



83



85



70

And online this month Alain Resnais and Věra Chytilová remembered | Yoshitarō Nomura | Godfrey Reggio | post-punk artists' movies | orphan films | WrestleMania! bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

THE DEBUT FEATURE
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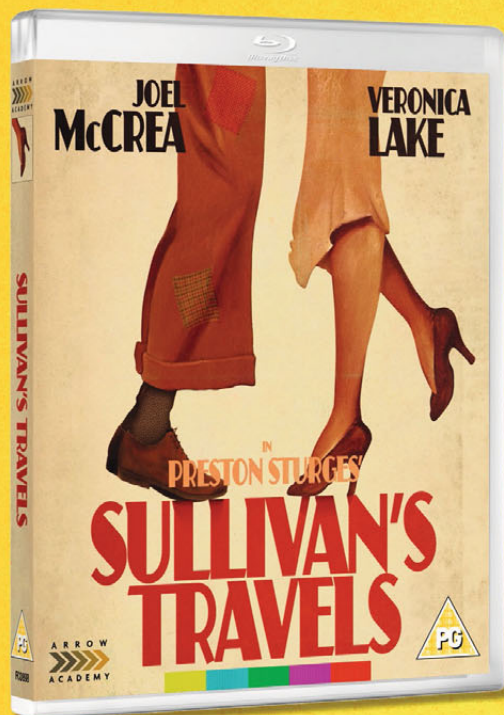


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Cornag Specialist

Tel: 01895 433800

Bookshop distribution

Central Books

Tel: 020 8986 4854

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight & Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc. 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway NJ 08854.

Subscription office:

For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact: Subscription Department

Sight & Sound

Abacus e-Media

3rd Floor Chancery Exchange

10 Furnival Street, London, EC4A 1AB

Tel: 020 8955 7070

Fax: 020 8421 8244

Email: sightandsound@alliance-media.co.uk

Annual subscription rates:

UK £45, Eire and ROW £68

£10 discount for BFI members



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The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



Editorial Nick James



TWITTERCISM

What has social media got to do with film criticism?

I was led to ponder this by a tweet I received on 13 March, which read: “@filmnickjames Wow. Already 3 years on Twitter today.”

The message itself is, of course, typical of the silliness, triviality and cod-eagerness that much of social media's discourse generates. But I hope I'm not about to get too pompous about it, because I'm operating in that same world and am as guilty of as many sins as the next half-dislocated hand. I don't regret Twitter. It helps me quickly identify and disseminate articles, images, trailers, etc, to this readership, to colleagues and to friends, and to make the occasional short comment, however idiotic. I was glad to find out how much time had flown, and that reminder got me thinking about how useful – or not – the Twitter frenzy is that now happens at big festivals.

Disapproval of social media and attempts to control it are becoming more insistent. Prime Minister Erdoğan's pathetic recent attempt to shut down Twitter and subsequently YouTube in Turkey may be followed up by a more stringent prosecution of his wishes. That Erdoğan sees social media as a threat in need of crushing is yet another indicator of how effective social media can be and how much of electronic mass communication still remains out of the restraining and censoring hands of the powerful, as indeed the Edward Snowden leaks continue to demonstrate.

At the much less serious level of cinema, there are also attempts at restraint – even if they are more genteel and gracious in form. Journalists at the Berlin Film Festival were requested to refrain from tweeting about the films they'd seen at press screenings until after the evening galas had finished. Most of my colleagues went along with this – we are, after all, guests of the festival – but the consequence was that fewer people bothered to tweet about the films at all, an outcome that for Berlin was surely self-defeating. I don't question the festival's right to make such a request, I merely think it shows they don't yet understand how social media works.

What's more curious and troubling are attempts to police social media made by critics themselves. Let me give you an example out of personal guilt: I have unthinkingly retweeted other people's attacks (albeit of a tongue-in-cheek variety) on the kind of online US reviewers who spend their whole time boosting nearly ever movie that's released. These individuals

Some critics do seem to think it's their tech-given right to call out those who 'get it wrong' on a given film, as if commenting on film was a business of good/bad, right/wrong name-calling



certainly deserve reproval, but by retweeting those attacks, I'm tacitly supporting something I usually can't abide: the policing of a critical line.

Regrettably, some critics on Twitter do seriously seem to think it's their tech-given right to gang up and enforce opinion on any given film, to call out those who 'get it wrong', as if commenting on film was an entirely Manichean business of good/bad, right/wrong name-calling. There's a kind of arrant high-horseism to some exchanges that, for me, makes commentators look weak and self-glorifying – as if they think intolerance of other's opinions is a requisite part of the critic's make-up. It's a mild form of cyberbullying, but perhaps I'm just out of touch with what works in gathering followers. As Mark Kermode's book *Hatchet Job* has recently reminded us, negative reviews are enthusiastically read by more people than positive ones. No doubt castigating tweets rate higher than straightforward, informative ones.

My complaint, of course, has its own built-in dichotomy. Criticism as it is often practised operates as a form of policing, or at least gatekeeping, of film culture – although, I would contend, not when it's at its best. And to talk about criticism even being possible in 140 characters is itself a large claim. But where does that leave the critic emerging full of excitement and enthusiasm from, say, a new Terrence Malick film at Cannes and wanting to be among the first to comment? Attempts to encourage an etiquette of social media don't stick but, since I'm as guilty as the next person, I'm going to commit here to being rather more descriptive than prescriptive in future and I'll do my best not to disparage any of my colleagues – unless they're wrong, that is. ☺

IN THE FRAME

ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND



After six decades, the French animated classic *The King and the Mockingbird* finally makes it to British screens in its intended form

By Andrew Osmond

This month sees the cinema release of a gem of traditional, hand-drawn animation, without a frame of CGI. *The King and the Mockingbird* (*Le Roi et l'Oiseau*) is a fairytale with points in common with classic Disney features – most obviously, adorable cartoon birds and animals – but it's far stranger. In an impossibly huge castle, a boy sweep and a shepherdess emerge from paintings and are chased from rooftops to dungeons by a scowling king and his minions. Throughout, the children are protected by the mockingbird, a jolly guardian angel who shields the meek and jeers the authorities who threaten them.

Directed by France's Paul Grimault, who started work on the film in 1948, *The King and the Mockingbird* belongs to the same strange dimension of children's cinema as *Spirited Away* (2001) or *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T* (1952). Like them, *Mockingbird* is a leisurely journey through a threatening but beguiling wonderland, an impossibly huge edifice and dreamspace. There are endless stairs, conveyor belts, winged policeman, Venetian canals, dancing lions and a giant robot.

Of recent cartoons, *The Lego Movie* comes closest for spontaneous creativity but *Mockingbird* is far more genteel, despite its Gallic jabs at the aristocracy. Along with the bird and the castle, the film's best character is its refined, lyrical score by the late neoclassical composer Wojciech Kilar, whose live-action credits include *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and *The Pianist* (2002).

The film also has a droll, witty script by the poet Jacques Prévert. Yet large parts of *Mockingbird* have little or no dialogue, anticipating the near-silent cartoon features of Sylvain Chomet (*Belleville Rendez-vous*). Grimault had been friends with Jacques Tati. The early silent scenes are especially strong, with measured passages showing the king being wordlessly offended by a new royal portrait or falling victim to his neuroses in his

High life: a sweep and a shepherdess navigate an enchanted castle in *The King and the Mockingbird*

Jean Paul Gaultier

Highlighting a lesser-known side of the French couturier's career, the film programme accompanying the designer's exhibition at the Barbican, London, will showcase a number of his costume collaborations with directors such as Peter Greenaway ('The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover') and Pedro Almodóvar ('Kika', right, and 'The Skin I Live in'). Gaultier has also selected a number of his filmic influences, including his favourite, Fellini's 'Satyricon'.



Apichatpong Weerasethakul

The centrepiece of 'Double Vision', an exhibition of new work by the Thai filmmaker at the Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London (11 April – 17 May), is the installation 'Dilbar' (right), a ghostly black-and-white portrait of a Bengali construction worker living and labouring in the UAE, showing for the first time in the UK.



ON OUR
RADAR



Road to ruin: winged policemen, dancing lions and a robot are among the denizens of the magical realm

bedchamber. The king and his flunkies are pompous caricatures but also such pitiable villains that you're often a bit sorry for them when they meet their comeuppances, generally by falling down one of the castle's endless trapdoors. ("How many trapdoors are there?" declared a little boy at a preview of the film.)

The film originated in the 1940s, when much of its animation was made. But in 1950 Grimault was removed from the film by his producer, impatient at the slow rate of progress. The situation parallels the terrible fate of Richard Williams's later *The Thief and the Cobbler*, which ended up being released as a hideous travesty after its creator's ejection. Grimault's film suffered less, opening in 1953 as *La Bergère et le Ramoneur* (*The Shepherdess and the Sweep*) and dubbed into English as *The Curious Adventures of Mr. Wonderbird*, with Peter Ustinov as the title character.

Even in this compromised form, the film had the strangeness and some of the lyricism of Grimault's vision. It also had a profound impact on two young Japanese animators, Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki, who went on to co-found Studio Ghibli. Given the film's

history, it's ironic that Miyazaki suggests it taught him about the importance of directors in animated features. "The overall balance of the feature is something determined not by a group of animators, but by someone in a position to see the work as a whole – the director," Miyazaki wrote in a 1979 article reprinted in the book *Starting Point*. "The more sophisticated the subject you are trying to depict, the more important the scenario becomes. Look at *La Bergère et le Ramoneur*."

A year after Miyazaki wrote this, Grimault finally released his own cut. He had reclaimed the rights and negative in 1977, then fought for funds to complete the film his way. One challenge was constructing a new negative in Eastmancolor – the previous version had been made in Technicolor but the negative was now unusable. Previously unmade scenes were created by old and new animators working together, including a heartrending coda involving a robot and a baby bird. Grimault lived to see the film hailed in France; he died in 1994 but this British release helps his work live on. 

 **The King and the Mockingbird** is released in UK cinemas on 11 April

ANATOMY OF A MOVIE MUPPETS MOST WANTED

18%	The Band Wagon (1953)
15%	Hollywood or Bust (1956)
15%	The Return of the Pink Panther (1975)
12%	Matinee (1993)
12%	The Player (1992)
10%	From Russia with Love (1963)
8%	It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963)
4%	Bullets over Broadway (1994)
3%	Airplane! (1980)
1%	Opening Night (1977)



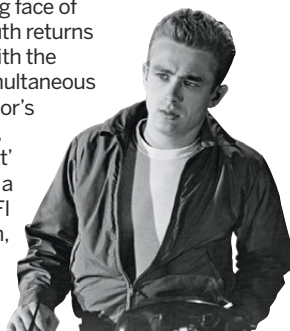
QUOTE OF THE MONTH WALT DISNEY

'I've always had a nightmare. I dream that one of my pictures has ended up in an art theatre, and I wake up shaking'



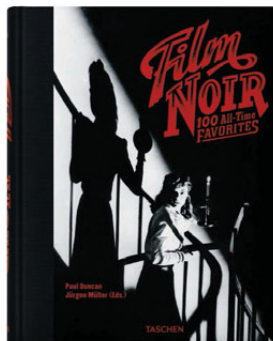
James Dean

The iconic, brooding face of 1950s troubled youth returns to the big screen with the restoration and simultaneous rerelease of the actor's only three features, 'East of Eden,' 'Giant' and 'Rebel Without a Cause' (right), at BFI Southbank, London, and cinemas nationwide from 18 April.



Film Noir

A wide-ranging and lavishly illustrated survey, 'Film Noir: 100 All-Time Favorites' (right) takes in precursors, classics and obscurities, as well as recent neo-noir, with an introduction by Paul Schrader.



Peter Sellers

A trio of comedy shorts from Peter Sellers's early career – including two spoofs of government information films that were long believed lost, 'Dearth of a Salesman' (right) and 'Insomnia Is Good For You' (both 1957) – will be shown at the opening gala of the Southend-on-Sea Film Festival on 1 May.



GLOVE STORIES

The snugness of a hand in a glove often has an erotic charge – but the associations tend to be destructive rather than sentimentally intimate



By Hannah McGill

Cosy as it might be, the phrase ‘hand in glove’ is rarely deployed positively. Applied to political or business relationships, it tends

to imply some degree of cronyism or corruption. In the Smiths song which – I apologise – will likely be stuck in your head after you read this column, it serves to express Morrissey’s singularly jaundiced view of the trajectory of coupledom: appallingly self-absorbed commingling (“The sun shines out of our behinds”) tailed by near-inevitable disappointment (“I’ll probably never see you again”). Shakespeare – whose father was a glove maker and who used rather a lot of glove metaphors in his work – has his besotted Romeo fantasise about being a glove on Juliet’s hand but, outdoing even Morrissey’s romantic pessimism, has that immature yearning lead directly to the grave. A hand is closer to a glove than a person should be to a person.

In *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), adopted Margot Tenenbaum’s exclusion from the intimacy of both her birth and adoptive families has an echo in her loss of a finger in a wood-chopping accident; with Anderson’s customary attention to whimsical detail, a brief shot and intertitle show the corresponding finger being removed from her glove. She later has the finger replaced with a wooden prosthesis – and finds, in a romantic relationship with her adoptive brother Richie, a dubious way to reattach herself to the Tenenbaum family.

Elsewhere, the close fit of fingers in a glove, or the suggestive removal of one, tends to be more straightforwardly sexual. *The Age of Innocence* (1993), based on Edith Wharton’s 1920 novel, uses the removal of a glove and the kissing of a hand and wrist as a de facto sex scene. What commences as a formal gesture appropriate to the fussily decorated and stuffily decorous social world occupied by Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Countess Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer) swiftly becomes unmistakably erotic, the exposure of the countess’s wrist as close as that unconsummated love will come to an undressing. (The gesture is also characterised as religious, both by Wharton and in Martin Scorsese and Jay Cocks’s script: Newland “kissed her palm as if he had kissed a relic” in the novel, while in the script the kiss is “a ceremonial”.)

We may suppose that Scorsese pondered the sequence in *On the Waterfront* (1954) in which another close-fitting woman’s glove serves as a conduit for displaced sexual energy. It’s just after Terry (Marlon Brando) has asked Edie (Eva Marie Saint) if she is “training to be a nun” that she drops her white glove and he – as improvised by Brando – picks it up, fondles it, puts it on. It works in terms of delaying her but also almost seems to direct her thinking



Touch of class: Daniel Day-Lewis and Michelle Pfeiffer in Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence*

In Scorsese’s film, the exposure of the countess’s wrist is as close as her unconsummated love will come to an undressing



All fingers and thumbs: *The Royal Tenenbaums*

towards touching. “They just didn’t know how to handle you,” she says of the nuns who bullied him when he was a child. His response – “How would you have done it?” – comes quick as a flash and draws her first flirtatious smile.

Though Brando is more childlike and charming in this scene than sexually threatening, the thrusting of fingers into snug spaces has clear connotations of forceful or forced penetration – perhaps one reason that O.J. Simpson’s showy attempt to fit his hand into the glove he was accused of having worn to murder his wife and her friend was such a charged moment of his trial. The idea of a rapaciously destructive gloved hand, one that cannot make contact without hurting, drives the horror of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and its sequels, in which virginal youths are pursued by a killer intent on deflowering them to death with bladed fingers. But it also haunts the immeasurably cutesier *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), shading with masochism

WOMEN IN NEW YORK



Edward Scissorhands



A Nightmare on Elm Street



On the Waterfront

the fantasies that besotted neighbour Joyce (Kathy Baker) has about Edward (Johnny Depp) and rendering painfully impossible any consummation between Edward and his own crush, Kim (Winona Ryder). Edward can't strip off his gloves like Countess Olenska: his destructive garb is part of him, just as Freddy Krueger's deadly glove would have fused with his flesh and become part of him by the time of the seventh film, Wes Craven's *New Nightmare* (1994). The notion of a glove as protection, for or from its wearer, is overturned; Edward cannot help but scar his own face as well as cutting others, while Freddy's urges make his slightest touch deadly. Though one is a benign monster and one a vicious one, both embody male desire as inevitably and helplessly destructive. Countess Olenska might have reason to agree; Edie from *On The Waterfront*, or at least the nuns who educated her, might too. As for Morrissey's and O.J. Simpson's thoughts on the matter, we can but guess. 📺

As Claudia Weill's 1978 *Girlfriends* gets a rare screening in London, we celebrate movies about women trying to make it in NYC

By Violet Lucca

Touted as a haven for artists, a place to reinvent oneself or, more parochially, the centre of all culture, New York has always drawn the young and ambitious – even though the Giuliani and Bloomberg administrations have made it increasingly hard for the Frances Halladays and Hannah Horvaths to get by. But films like *Girlfriends*, screening at the Birds Eye View Film Festival (8-13 April), suggest that whether you call it 'bohemian' or 'hipster', there have always been – and will always be – lingering doubts about whether moving to New York is the right thing to do, to say nothing of the limitless supply of sketchy guys messing with your head, or the struggles of paying rent on time.



2 My Sister Eileen (1955)

Taking the leap from small-town Ohio to a crappy basement flat in Greenwich Village, two sisters pursue their respective writing and acting dreams. In between the facile musical numbers, they dodge a handful of men who take advantage of their creative ambitions in order to bed them – and resolve their mutual jealousy.



4 Party Girl (1995)

Imbuing the zeitgeist of downtown 90s New York with a screwball comedy flavour, Parker Posey's slave to fashion is reluctant to grow up – or vogue. Her desire for everyone to take her seriously leads her to buckle down and become a real librarian. She gets the guy and finally makes her rent money.



1 Gold Diggers of 1933 (1933)

Boasting four leading ladies – Ruby Keeler, Joan Blondell, Aline MacMahon and Ginger Rogers – this pre-Code backstage musical shows Busby Berkeley at his best. Sharing an apartment, clothing and dreams of Broadway success despite the Depression, these chorus girls' dedication to each other proves stronger than any grift.



3 Girlfriends (1978)

More than just wondering whether women can have it all, this eloquently and humorously explores relationships between men and women, Jewish women and God, artists and their work, and female best friends. Resisting any easy conclusions, the implications of Susan and Anne's final exchange are quietly devastating.



5 The Last Days of Disco (1998)

With its stream of disco hits and Whit Stillman's 'the way people who think they're smart remember conversations' dialogue, it's easy to miss Alice and Charlotte's relationship, which primarily consists of giving behavioural advice. They're not just scenesters aspiring towards glamour – they're in active competition.

A DISH BEST SERVED COLD

To get his revenge drama *Blue Ruin* made, director Jeremy Saulnier first had to try to disown his 'goofy' horror-comedy debut

By Catherine Bray

Unlike the perpetrators of bloody vengeance in *Death Wish*, *Kill Bill* or even the UK's own low-budget contribution to the payback genre, *Dead Man's Shoes*, the protagonist of *Blue Ruin* makes for a very shambolic assassin. Imagine a Woody Allen character or a silent film comedian suddenly required to load a shotgun and strike down upon his enemies with great vengeance and furious anger. As second-time director Jeremy Saulnier puts it, "We wanted to embrace the fact that we couldn't afford to do it right. So let's do it wrong, let's cast the wrong guy – what if he's one of us?"

Despite this promising concept, the project did not attract conventional funding. So Saulnier – keen to succeed as a director before he and his wife had their third child – poured his family's life-savings into the project, and still came up short. With a Kickstarter campaign plugging the gap and Saulnier's childhood friend Macon Blair in the lead role, *Blue Ruin* came together only to be turned down by Sundance in 2013, seemingly its natural home. All appeared lost until the unlikelyst of 11th-hour reprieves – selection for Directors' Fortnight at Cannes.

Catherine Bray: It feels like you've come out of nowhere to artistic acclaim, but it's been quite a long road, hasn't it?

Jeremy Saulnier: It's been a very circuitous path. I was a bit of a dinosaur coming out of film school in 1998 – I went to NYU. We were the last class to start and finish everything on film, on 16mm. I missed the digital revolution and found myself on the outskirts watching these kids who graduated eight years after I did just go from zero to 60 and come out with these major films. So I had to get back in the trenches. To make a living I had to learn how to shoot and edit and do make-up and just about everything on set. It definitely helps, because when I'm on a set you can't get one by me: I've held boom mikes, I've applied make-up, I can light and shoot, so I'll call bullshit, any time of day.

CB: How did the beach bum as tragic vengeance figure concept come about?

JS: When I did *Murder Party* [2007] it pigeonholed me as a comedy-horror director. So I wanted to devise a film that would allow me to go anywhere. It would be a horror and a character piece and an adventure and a tragedy.

I knew Macon could carry this movie – he would be my secret weapon – and I wanted something visceral, emotional, something that would be scary. I said, "Let's place our trust in this miscast character and see what happens," and it almost wrote itself.

CB: So there was a stigma attached to *Murder Party*?

JS: We had to disown *Murder Party*, we had to pretend we weren't the horror guys who made a goofy movie six years ago. This was Jeremy Saulnier the director of photography on *Putty Hill*, the acclaimed indie picture, joining with



Jeremy Saulnier: 'I wanted to devise a film that would allow me to go anywhere in the future'

[independent studio] filmscience. Our track record just didn't mesh with the film we wanted to make; we wouldn't have funded us either.

CB: A lot of movies involving hitmen or blackly comic violence tend to be very talky, but you've gone in the opposite direction – was that a conscious reaction?

JS: I saw a lot of genre films that were really brutal and heartless and I saw a lot of films with too much talking and too many characters. So I thought we could try to carve out a new space and sneak under the radar with something that would be a relief for potential programmers and be a genre film that was meant for the core genre audience, but would also hopefully have enough story and character and raw emotion that it would appeal to broader audiences as well.

CB: The film looks gorgeous – what camera did you use?

I said, 'Let's place our trust in this miscast character and see what happens,' and the script almost wrote itself



Vengeance is mine: Macon Blair in *Blue Ruin*

JS: I used a Canon C300. It was important that I be able to afford it and own our camera. Many times on film shoots, I would shoot principal photography on a big, bad camera and we'd do three six-day weeks and we'd wrap, and then we had to do a bunch of pick-ups or exteriors or something, and we'd use something way cheaper. You'd rent and shoot on the best digital camera in the world, and then you'd put it next to pick-up footage from a \$2,000 consumer camera and be like, "Why are we doing this?" Just be consistent. So we bought the C300 and then we were empowered to shoot whenever we wanted.

CB: Were you able to enjoy the shoot?

JS: It was the most stressful thing I've done in my professional life. I never really enjoyed the production like I should have because I couldn't sleep. We went through every prescription pill that everyone on the crew had and I couldn't sleep for one REM cycle. I'd have storyboards going through my brain, camera set-ups; it was pretty intense. I felt like I'd done so much bullshitting and I'd rallied the troops and gotten this army down to Virginia and I realised: this could be the worst thing ever. If this is a total disaster of a shoot and the film sucks, I would have to go limping back to New York and we would definitely have to sell the house.

CB: Does *Blue Ruin* reflect your taste in cinema?

JS: I get high art, but I grew up liking horror movies – I really respect genre. The hardest things to execute are creating real tension and real laughs. Since *Blue Ruin*, I've come to be familiar with this new term, 'elevated genre', which just means genre movies that aren't really B-movies. I'm more attracted to high-stakes scenarios and visceral filmmaking than I am more cerebral filmmaking or dialogue-driven stuff. **S**

i Blue Ruin is released in UK cinemas on 2 May and is reviewed on page 60

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GENERIC MUTATIONS

When a film blends numerous stylistic ingredients it quickly becomes unclassifiable, creating a kind of cubist cinema



By Mark Cousins

Jonathan Glazer's brilliant *Under the Skin* has set me thinking about uncategorisable movies. Tod Browning's *Freaks*, Leos Carax's

Holy Motors, Imamura's *A Man Vanishes* (which starts out as a documentary but ends up not), Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* (in which children re-enact their imprisonment), Derek Jarman's *Blue* (a non-animated film made without a camera), Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie* and many more seem to combine irreconcilable elements. The resulting tension and tonal complexity makes them exciting.

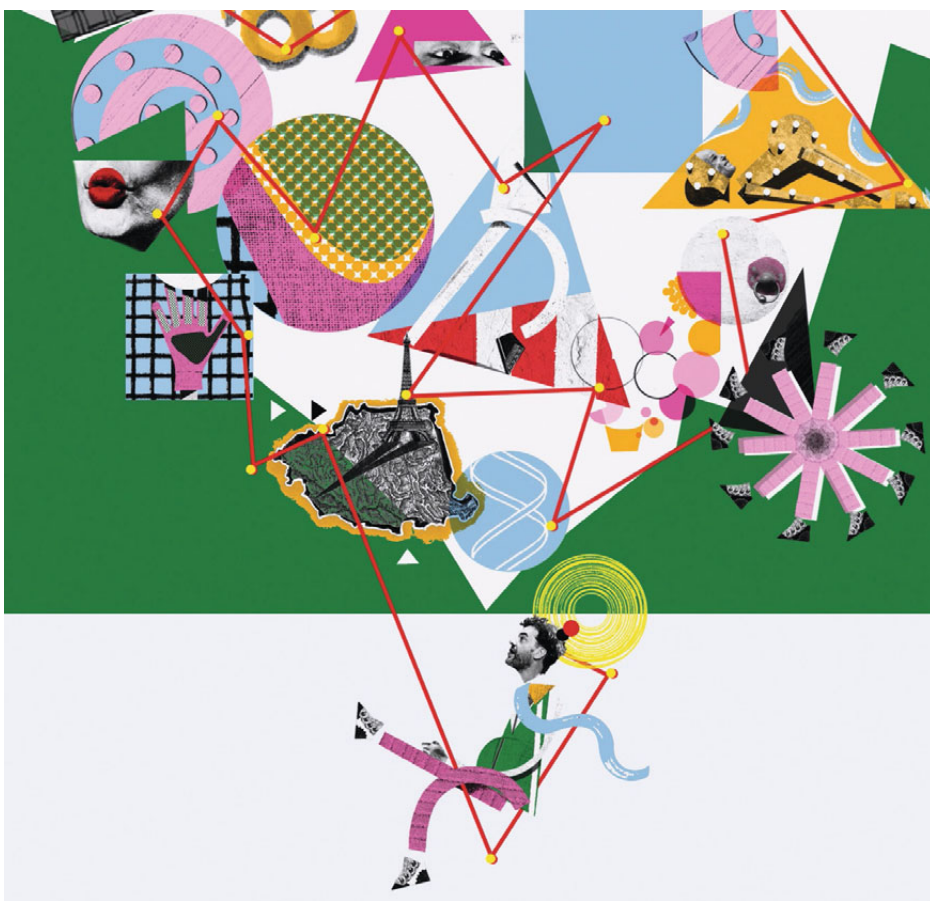
I want to know more about that excitement. Let's start with a very categorisable film – say, Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen's *On the Town*. It is a musical: it has singing and dancing, and utopian happiness. Then compare *On the Town* to dark musicals such as *Cabaret*, Scorsese's *New York, New York*, or Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay*, which combine the elements of the 'bright' musical with pessimism or doubt. They have counteracting moods or flavours. If *On the Town* is chocolate, the dark musicals are chocolate + chilli.

A musical like *Gold Diggers of 1933* seems to go further still. It has joy and darkness (the post-traumatic stress disorder of soldiers returning from World War I) plus a degree of geometrical abstraction that makes it look, at times, as if we are seeing it under a microscope. Chocolate + chilli + chicken, if you like.

How far can such additionality go? Films start to become uncategorisable when they add more ingredients to the recipe. *Under the Skin* feels like a Kubrick film but also Kiarostami's *Ten*, and Cocteau's *Orphée* too, and Gregory's *Girl* to boot. To watch it is to undergo a heady, fascinating, disturbing, never-before-experienced range of emotions and reactions. Chocolate + chilli + chicken + Cinzano.

The great editor and sound designer Walter Murch has a theory of three. He says that if there are one, two or three people walking in a shot, you have to synch up their footsteps but with more than three, you can just add a variety of footsteps without synching them up. I am currently drinking a bottle of apple, beetroot and blackcurrant juice and can just about taste the separate flavours. Our minds cannot follow more than three at once. Three trees are three trees, four or more are a copse.

Could it be the same for polygeneric, polytonal movies? If they have three styles or modes we can separate them out, but more and the movie seems to float free of its generic moorings into a place all of its own. None of the singular elements is dominant enough to define it, so it remains undefinable. I would love to see a history of British filmmaking based on such *sui generis* cinema (SGC) – Powell and Pressburger's *A*



Matter of Life and Death, Peter Watkins's *Culloden*, Peter Greenaway's *The Tempest*, Sally Potter's *Orlando*, Jarman's *Blue*, Antonia Bird's *Ravenous*, Douglas Gordon's co-directed *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait*, Clio Barnard's *The Arbor*, Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England*, *Under the Skin*, etc.

When I first typed the word generic three sentences ago, I misspelled it as genetic (something I also did in my Dispatches column on criticism several issues back). My typo is revealing because if the 'law of three' explanation is a bit schematic, a better way to look at freaky films such as *Under the Skin*, *Post Tenebras Lux*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *Gummo*, *La Jetée*, *Haxan*, *Playtime*, *Enter the Void*, *The Colour of Pomegranates* or *The Apple* might be to see them as genetic mutations. Maybe they are 'errors' in the cinematic genome. Or, better still, maybe such films are like male nipples, the results of Darwinian evolution changing course because of changing realities. I like this idea that SGC is a formal displacement, the equivalent of continental drift in which Paris used to be on the equator. And, to shift framework again, maybe they are, well, queer.

Yes, I know I am mixing metaphors crazily here, between aesthetics, food, genetics, evolution, geology and sexuality but that's part

If there are three styles or modes we can separate them out, but more and the movie seems to float free of its generic moorings

of my point about SGC. It mixes metaphors, does several incompatible things at the same time, sees a vase from the front, side and top, as in cubism. And maybe I could learn from this. Maybe the form of this piece should reflect its content so, for example... *tout d'un coup, je vous écris en français. Et le 'je' n'est pas Mark Cousins. Je suis Jonathan Glazer (né 22 jours après Cousins) et je vous écris pour montrer le couple dans la forme de mon film, et d'avoir du plaisir, et pour vous donner un avant-goût de 'Under the Skin'. Et, aussi, pour être honnête, je ne suis pas en train d'écrire à tous.*

Je parle de ces mots et de les enregistrer sur mon iPhone. Il est minuit et je suis assis à la frontière entre l'Ecosse et l'Angleterre. Je suis seule et j'ai un cocktail Molotov. Il fait froid ici, mais en 30 secondes, la bombe va exploser dans les grandes flammes, évoquant les films de Werner Herzog, Francis Coppola et David Lynch. Vous avez 30 secondes pour quitter le cinéma.

Merci. Gaspar Noé.

Translation: all of a sudden I am writing in French. And the 'I' is not Mark Cousins. I am Jonathan Glazer (born 22 days after Cousins) and I'm writing to show the formal torque in my film, and to have fun, and to give you a taste of *Under the Skin*. And also, to be honest, I'm not writing at all. I'm speaking these words and recording them on my iPhone. It's midnight and I'm sitting at the border between Scotland and England. I'm alone and I have a petrol bomb. It's cold here but in 30 seconds the bomb will explode in great flames, evoking films by Werner Herzog, Francis Coppola and David Lynch. You have 30 seconds to leave the cinema.

Thanks. Gaspar Noé. 🍷

DEVELOPMENT TALE

TRACKS



Caravan sight: Mia Wasikowska and supporting cast in *Tracks*

Robyn Davidson's nine-month trek across Australia was nothing next to her book's near 30-year journey to the screen

By Charles Gant

In 1975 25-year-old Robyn Davidson arrived in Alice Springs, central Australia, with an unlikely mission: to walk across the country, accompanied only by wild camels. It would be two years before she embarked on that solo adventure, in which time she learned how to train and handle the animals. Nine months later she reached the West Australian coast, 1,700 miles away. Having been photographed at various intervals by photojournalist Rick Smolan, Davidson made the May 1978 cover of *National Geographic* magazine and the story was syndicated across the globe. Davidson's own account of her trip, in the book *Tracks*, appeared in 1980.

Despite a story that was short on both supporting characters and narrative shape, Hollywood soon showed interest in adapting the book for the big screen, recognising that the protagonist could be a draw for a major young actress. Davidson, now 63, recalls that Sydney

Pollack was the first to bite, following the multi-Oscar-winning success of *Out of Africa* (1985). "We had lunch together in London and after the first glass of wine he said, 'Well, honey, you're not gonna like what I'm gonna do to your book.' I loved him for that. In fact, I loved him period. And he offered me a great deal of money. But I was very high-minded at the time, and I knew I didn't want *Tracks* to be a Hollywood film. So I said no. Do I regret it? Well, I regret the money."

Next, British producer Sarah Radclyffe (*A World Apart*, 1987) optioned *Tracks* and attached Michael Apted to direct. Says Davidson, "He went to Australia to find locations, I remember, so it must have been quite advanced in terms of funding. But for whatever reason, nothing got off the ground. I realised it's quite a difficult book to translate to film. A great deal happens, but most of it happens internally."

Heat returned to the project with a casting breakthrough. "Guess what, you'll never believe it," Radclyffe rang one day to say, "I've agreed to co-produce with Disney and Julia Roberts wants to play you."

"I thought Julia was a terrific actress," Davidson says. "But what would the script be like?"

Variety reported this deal back in November 1993, outlining a \$1 million acquisition of a

screenplay written by Ruth Graham (*Becoming Colette*) and a co-production with Joe Roth's Disney-affiliated Caravan Pictures. At the time Roth said, "This is a completed screenplay. There's a producer on it, and an actress is ready to make it her next movie, so this is our Christmas 1995 release." But the project languished.

Australian producer Emile Sherman always had his eye on *Tracks*, and when he joined forces with Iain Canning in the UK to form See-Saw Films in 2008 he was already in dialogue with Davidson's agent Stephen Durbridge. "Having bases in both the UK and Australia, we were trying to find Australian stories that were international, and British stories that are international," Canning explains. "Part of the reason so many people had been attracted to *Tracks* [is that] everybody believes in its potential to reach out from just being a domestic Australian film and become something larger."

In 2010, *Tracks* finally came out of option from Disney, and the pair, who were about to deliver *The King's Speech* that autumn, set to work. As screenwriter they chose Marion Nelson, known in Australia as a playwright but with no filmed screen credits to her name.

Sherman and Canning opted to attach a director at this early stage, going to John Curran

(*The Painted Veil*), who, although American, had travelled in Australia as a young man and had read the book. "I think that any traveller coming to Australia, spending time there, was pretty much given *Tracks* at immigration," Canning says. "It became a real rites-of-passage book."

When mapping the story, the filmmakers had to keep in mind the logistics of shooting. Canning explains: "Within the vast landscape of Australia we had to have a number of beats that would feel and look very different, but at the same time we wanted to have a central base where we could get most of those looks within a short space of time. So working that out, working out how the funding model was going to work, the various different regional funds and so on, it was a bit of a process to get *Tracks* ready from a logistical point of view as well as a script point of view."

Everyone agreed that presenting *Tracks* as a love story between Davidson and the photographer would be reductive, and were similarly cautious about simplifying Davidson's motivation. "Robyn was adamant that she didn't want things simmered down to a basic trigger reason," Canning says. "We wanted it to be as complex as we could possibly do it, while making sure the audience is engaged, and has some form of map to the internal journey of the character."

When it came to casting, according to Canning, "You always want to develop scripts where your gut instinct is: there's an interesting role for someone." And with significant funding coming from Australia, the pressure

I was very high-minded, and I didn't want 'Tracks' to be a Hollywood film. So I said no. Do I regret it? Well, I regret the money

to find a major US star never materialised.

When See-Saw first acquired the book in 2010 they happened to be meeting the 20-year-old Mia Wasikowska for another project. Canning says, "I remember Emile picking up the *Tracks* book from his desk and saying to Mia, 'Have you seen how much you look like Robyn Davidson?' At that time, Mia would have been too young for it. But then a couple of years pass, and then you remember that moment, and we were lucky enough to get her. She was so right for it." Adam Driver (*TV's Girls*) was chosen to play photographer Smolan.

By the time See-Saw optioned *Tracks* in 2010, Davidson was sceptical that a film would ever happen, "So I didn't much care who had it." But meeting and getting on with Sherman and Canning encouraged her, and she hoped for the best, even though, "I still wasn't sure how my story could be adapted to film."

Tracks finally passed the finish line nearly three decades after Pollack first tried to woo Davidson. She says, "It wasn't until Mia agreed to play me that I began to really care about the film. Or to care about the people making it. I've been incredibly lucky to have ended up with this team. How many writers can say that?"

i *Tracks* is released in UK cinemas on 25 April, and is reviewed on page 88

THE NUMBERS THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL

By Charles Gant

Making movies with Wes Anderson is not like working with most other filmmakers. Thanks to his relationships with Indian Paintbrush and Scott Rudin Productions, he doesn't need development money from a studio while writing his scripts. He can complete his casting without any studio input. Only when he is ready to shoot does the selling process begin.

When Fox Searchlight read the screenplay for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, the company, which had taken US rights on *Fantastic Mr. Fox* and world rights on *The Darjeeling Limited*, was ready to go back in to business with him. Rebecca Kearey, head of international distribution, says: "The script was genuinely page-turning. It read really well." And given film distribution's increasing international emphasis and the steadily growing older audience, it didn't hurt that *Budapest's* action takes place in Europe with a nostalgic tinge. Ralph Fiennes, in the lead role of Monsieur Gustave, is not known for comedy, but his performance in Martin McDonagh's *In Bruges* – albeit in an entirely different comic register – gave comfort and encouragement.

With a production budget bigger than either *Darjeeling* or *Moonrise Kingdom*, *Budapest* presented more of a risk, but Fox Searchlight hoped that the sheer weight of the cast would entice audiences.

"It's a pretty fascinating group of people," Kearey says. "Even though you haven't got the big-swing box-office star, you've got a make-up of people who in any other world would never be in a movie together, apart from a Wes movie." And when it came to release, thanks to strong on-set photography, the company was able to deliver a poster that features shots of 17 individual cast members, targeting large outdoor sites that lent themselves to sustained engagement.

Opting not to enter the cauldron of Oscar season, Fox Searchlight unveiled the film on 6 February at the opening night of the Berlin Film Festival – a good fit, given the story setting – and followed up with release across most of Europe in early March. The strategy was to offer audiences something fresh and light after a long period of relatively serious awards-bait fare.



Servant trouble: *The Grand Budapest Hotel*

From the start, it was clear that *Budapest* was going to deliver a commercial breakthrough for Anderson in live action. The film opened in the UK on £1.53 million – 74 per cent of *Moonrise Kingdom's* lifetime box office. In France the figure was 84 per cent, and in Russia *Budapest* actually opened bigger than *Moonrise's* lifetime. Within ten days in the UK, *Budapest* had overtaken Anderson's previous biggest live-action film (*The Royal Tenenbaums*), and in its third week of play had climbed to the top of the UK box office, dethroning the videogame adaptation *Need for Speed*.

Clearly, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is reaching audiences that previously resisted Anderson, and that's possibly due to the switch from the filmmaker's regular milieu of privileged American neurotics. In the upstairs-downstairs world of the hotel, our attention is directed towards the workers rather than the guests: concierge Gustave, lobby boy Zero (newcomer Tony Revolori) and plucky baker's assistant Agatha (Saoirse Ronan). "We just loved these great characters and the mentorship of this young kid," says Kearey. "We always knew there was a core audience, but we felt good about our chances of going beyond it."

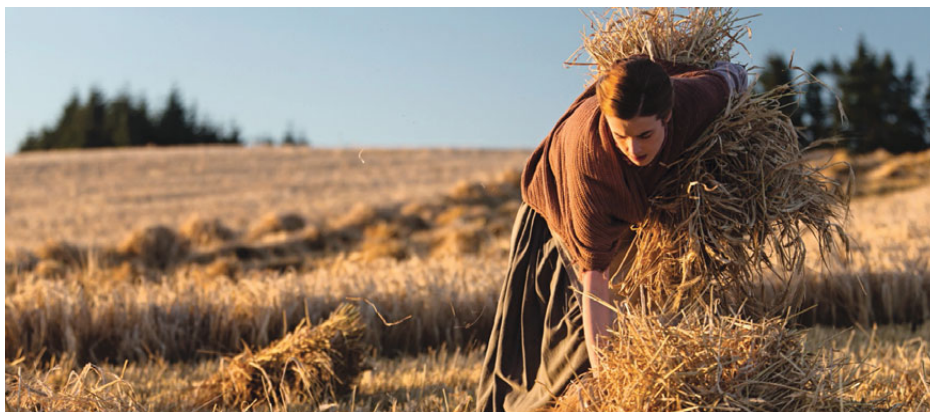
WES ANDERSON AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Fantastic Mr. Fox	2009	£9,189,894
The Grand Budapest Hotel	2014	£6,309,128*
The Royal Tenenbaums	2002	£3,329,372
Moonrise Kingdom	2012	£2,057,148
The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou	2005	£1,594,643
The Darjeeling Limited	2007	£1,494,636
Rushmore	1999	£424,055

*still on release: gross after 17 days

SUNRISE ON 'SUNSET'

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS



Field of dreams: Agyness Deyn in Terence Davies's long-awaited adaptation of *Sunset Song*

How a cherished project by an important filmmaker just managed to survive a 'clarification' of tax regulations



By Ben Roberts

The sun has risen at last on Terence Davies's long-cherished adaptation of *Sunset Song*, Lewis Grassic Gibbon's landmark

story of toil on the soil. Cameras have already rolled in New Zealand and moved to Luxembourg with Agyness Deyn, Peter Mullan and *Sunshine on Leith*'s Kevin Guthrie leading the cast.

Terence Davies is one of our finest filmmakers. I've been smitten with his work since a first glimpse of *The Long Day Closes* on (I would guess) Film '92, and when I was at Protagonist I found the experience of selling his last film, *The Deep Blue Sea*, equal parts punishing and rewarding. We came to blows only once, over the fonts and blue hues of our international sales materials; but his emotional attachment to his work and the trust he places in his partners to protect him made a quiet burden to shoulder, even when going through some of the more mechanical motions of selling his film.

Terence has been trying to bring *Sunset Song* to the screen for many years, and by the time the pieces were falling into place – the critical response to *The Deep Blue Sea* having no doubt lent it some momentum – I had moved on to the BFI. When the producers applied to the Film Fund for an investment, we felt it was a now-or-never opportunity for Terence to deliver his definitive women's picture. We were excited by the possibilities of him moving 'outside' and casting his eye over a landscape. But the film has not had an easy journey to production. Even after we had committed, prevailing market conditions forced this adaptation of a Scottish

When the UK is selling itself as 'open for business', this decision by HMRC could have a serious impact on film finance

national classic to shoot in Europe and beyond.

The quality of a Terence Davies film comes at a price, and the budget for *Sunset Song* is almost twice that of *The Deep Blue Sea*. Without a pre-sellable cast and with limited upfront 'market' money from the broadcasters (BBC Scotland invested in the film in exchange for UK television rights), the producers found it hard to raise the finance.

Eventually, they pieced the film together as a co-production with Luxembourg, with significant investment from the Iris Group, along with Enterprise Investment Scheme money to fill the remaining gap and cash-flow the UK tax credits. Still, money-related challenges – delays in closing the finance, some tax-year spend requirements – meant that the production would miss the crucial Scottish harvest, and the producers had to look to New Zealand for appropriate landscapes.

Then, with Terence and crew already on the ground, an 11th-hour clarification by HMRC on EIS guidelines regarding international co-productions put the EIS investment at risk. At this late stage, we – together with the refreshingly flexible Creative Scotland – felt obliged to increase our investments to make up the difference, while the UK tax credit advance was covered by the bond company.

At a time when the UK is selling itself as 'open for business', this decision by HMRC could have a serious impact on access to finance. The clarification of EIS guidelines essentially means that, because co-production films are made by more than one party, they won't fulfil the requirement that the EIS company involved must own 100 per cent of the copyright in the film.

Last month's budget included very positive extensions to the film tax credit – an increased rate of relief for larger-budget films, and a reduction in minimum UK spend requirement from 25 per cent to 10 per cent, which should encourage minority co-productions. But this new clampdown could carry unfortunate consequences for co-productions. We need to take this opportunity to discuss what, if any, room for manoeuvre HMRC may be prepared to consider.

Thankfully, Terence has been allowed to make hay while the sun is still shining. Early footage suggests that he may deliver what my colleague Lizzie Francke is calling his *Gone with the West Lothian Wind*. @bfbfen

IN PRODUCTION

● **The Taviani brothers**, Paolo and Vittorio, are to follow their Berlin Golden Bear-winning *Caesar Must Die* with *Wondrous Boccaccio*, a "free adaptation" of the stories in Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. In a statement the brothers explained: "We are telling these stories... because we accepted the challenge to create a contrast between the dark colour of the plague, which yesterday (like today, in a different way) is everywhere, and the transparent colour of love, ingenuity and poetry."

● **Ringo Lam**, the Hong Kong director whose 1987 film *City on Fire* was famously cited as an influence on Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, is to make his first feature in a decade. The as-yet-untitled project is said to be an action film, and will star Daniel Wu and Shawn Yue.

● **Giuseppe Tornatore**, who won an Oscar in 1990 for *Cinema Paradiso*, is to direct his next feature in the UK. *The Correspondence* is a romantic drama about a professor's affair with a young woman working in his field. Ennio Morricone is composing the score.

● **Ryan Gosling** is reportedly to be the somewhat unlikely producer, director and star of a biopic about Busby Berkeley. The film will be based on Jeffrey Spivak's book *Buzz: The Life and Art of Busby Berkeley*.

● **John Hillcoat** (*The Road*, *Lawless*) is at work on *Triple Nine*, a crime thriller about a group of corrupt Los Angeles police officers who have to shoot one of their own in order to pull off a bank heist, not knowing that another in their gang is double-crossing them. The starry cast includes Woody Harrelson, Casey Affleck, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Kate Winslet, Michael Peña and Aaron Taylor-Johnson.

● **Sofia Coppola** (below) is to direct a live-action film of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, replacing Joe Wright, who was originally attached to the project but who moved on to concentrate on *Pan*, his film of stories by J.M. Barrie. The screenplay has been written by Abi Morgan.



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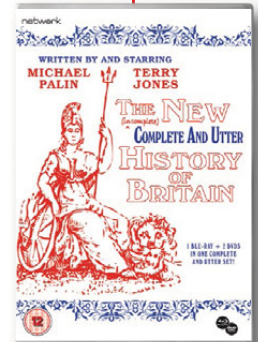


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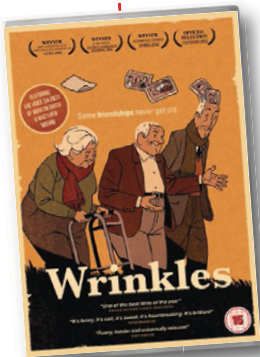


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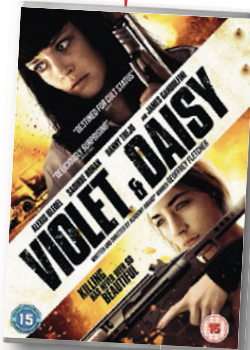
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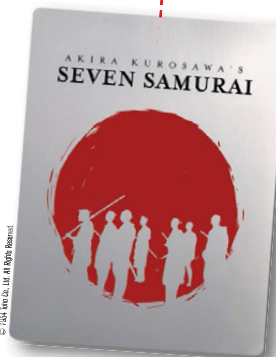


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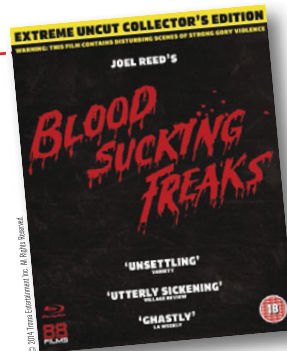
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PIERRE DROUOT

Belgian cinema is flourishing as never before – and the head of the Flanders Audiovisual Fund can claim a lot of the credit

By Geoffrey Macnab

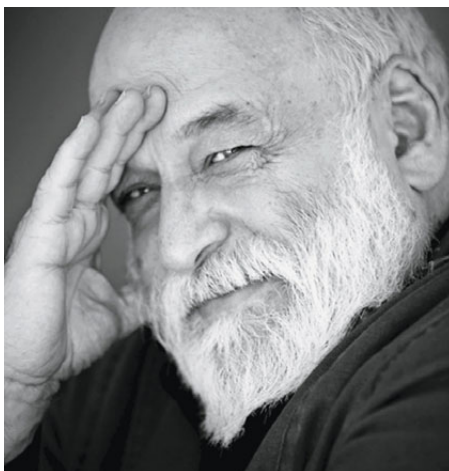
Flemish producer Pierre Drouot is blunt about what he encountered when he began his career in Belgium in the late 1960s: “There was no film business at all.” The government had begun funding film production in 1964, but little money was flowing through to filmmakers. What’s more, “The few Flemish films that were made went from the lab to the vaults of the Cinémathèque. They were made – but never shown.”

As co-director (with Paul Collet) of the erotic drama *Gisele* (*L'Etreinte*, 1968), and assistant director and co-writer of Harry Kümel's cult horror film *Daughters of Darkness* (*Le Rouge aux lèvres*, 1971), Drouot was part of a briefly surging Flemish New Wave. He went on to produce such films as Jaco Van Dormael's remarkable *Toto the Hero* (*Toto le héros*, 1991) and Raoul Servais's *Taxandria* (1994)... and then, in the mid 1990s, he retired and went to live in the south of France.

“I decided to live according to my own agenda, because when you are producing you are living according to the agenda of other people, mainly the director.”

Flash forward to the spring of 2014. Flemish cinema is thriving. Drouot's efforts as director of the Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF), a job he took on a temporary basis as “a crisis manager” in late 2005, are acknowledged to have galvanised the local film sector. This interview took place shortly after this year's Oscars, where a Flemish film, Felix van Groenningen's *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, had been nominated as Best Foreign Language Film. That followed a 2012 Oscar nomination for Michaël R. Roskam's *Bullhead*. Both films were developed and funded by the VAF.

A bluff, thickset figure, Drouot has always tried to win the support of the local filmmaking community and politicians alike.



Flemish giant: Pierre Drouot

He dismisses the idea that the VAF alone has reignited Flemish cinema: there were feted movies before the VAF was created in 2002 – Stijn Coninx's *Daens* (1992) and Dominique Derudder's *Everybody's Famous!* (*Iedereen Beroemd!*, 2000) were both Oscar-nominated.

But Drouot's pride in the VAF's achievements is evident. Since he took over, it has enjoyed an unbroken record of festival and box-office success, and Flemish cinema has attained an international visibility unthinkable 30 years ago.

“I was lucky because the system had changed,” Drouot says. The VAF was more independent and far better resourced than the original government-backed film fund set up in the 1960s. Its director encouraged filmmakers to take risks. “Don't present to us films that you think we will accept. Provoke us, push us,” was his message. He aimed to create “a climate of confidence”.

There is not one type of cinema. It's like with architecture. You don't say to architects, 'You all have to build the same houses'

The VAF helped set up a ‘Wild Card’ scheme, giving the best young film-school graduates a chance to develop their first professional films. They'd get €60,000, professional tutoring and complete creative freedom. The VAF also partnered on *Fait Divers*, a funding scheme launched by filmmaker Jan Verheyen at broadcaster VTM to support low-budget features – including Christophe van Rompaey's *Moscow, Belgium* (2007), which played in Cannes and was sold throughout the world.

Under Drouot the VAF has backed a wave of tough, abrasive films by confrontational young directors – among them Koen Mortier's *Ex Drummer* (2007) and the Karakatsanis brothers' *Small Gods* (2007). At the same time, auteurs such as Caroline Strubbe (*Lost Persons Area*), Fien Troch (*Someone Else's Happiness, Unspoken*) and van Groenningen were making personal, lyrical arthouse movies. Drouot was committed to as broad a range of filmmaking as possible. “There is not one type of cinema,” Drouot says. “It's like with architecture. You don't say to architects, ‘You all have to build the same houses.’”

It helped that local distributors and exhibitors supported new Belgian cinema. Drouot could convince the Flemish government of the cultural and economic value of cinema – and of its ability to promote Flanders abroad.

The VAF supports 10 to 12 features a year – Drouot and his team will invest €550,000 in a first or second feature, and €650,000 in a film by a more experienced director. Its annual production budget is between €6 and €7 million. With limited alternative sources of financing, local producers remain strongly dependent on the fund.

Drouot's initial 18-month contract is long finished, but he was asked to stay on: “At this point, I have a contract to the end of 2015 and we will see what happens. By that time, I will be 72.”

At least running a film fund is marginally less stressful than producing: “When you produce Jaco [van Dormael] or Raoul Servais, if something goes wrong it has an immediate effect on your life and on your bank account. Now, my bank account is not involved!”

TRIBUTE KARL BAUMGARTNER

The great producer's death, which we learned of shortly before going to press, has robbed cinema of an uncompromising visionary



By Nick Roddick

The death on 18 March of German producer Karl Baumgartner (pictured) passed largely unnoticed in the UK. But Baum (as almost everyone called him) marked world cinema in a number of important ways. When *Sight & Sound's* editor, Nick James, asked me for suggestions when he launched the new ‘Industry Profile’, the first word I said was ‘Baumi’. Sadly, it never happened.

I don't think I ever saw him without a cigar. But Baum had about as much in common with the cigar-chomping Hollywood stereotype as Noma does with Burger King. He believed in a kind of international cinema made by filmmakers as uncompromising in their vision as he was in his commitment to helping them realise it, including Emir Kusturica, Kim Ki-duk and Aki Kaurismäki.

Born in South Tyrol in Italy in 1949, he moved to Frankfurt in the 1970s where he ran an arthouse cinema and a distribution company. When the supply dwindled, he switched to producing. The IMDb lists 74 producer credits

over 25 years; one is tempted to say: “Only 74?”

“He sometimes juggled three or four films at a time,” says Michael Weber, head of sales company The Match Factory, which Baumi helped set up, “but he never dropped one.” Given the odds, that was amazing. During the shooting of *Luna Papa* (1999) in Tajikistan, the village set was washed away by floods and the crew had to be evacuated by the Red Cross. But the film was completed.

Baumi wrote the book on European producing, pioneering the combination of backing from different regional film funds. But unlike many European producers who content themselves with filling out the funding forms, for Baumi that was just the beginning.

His legacy lies less in the films he inspired than in his understanding of the role of the producer: not just to raise the money but to bring together ideas, talents and above all people – to enable, the way a chef enables a feast.

PRE-CODE HOLLYWOOD

In the brief window between the announcement of the Hays Code censorship guidelines in 1930 and the creation of a body with sufficient resources to implement them in 1934, Hollywood studios were able to portray America with a realism previously unseen in its history. Here, **Mike Mashon** explores the history of demands for a system of moral oversight and shows how conservatives lobbied to enforce it, while **James Bell** examines the new-found freedoms filmmakers enjoyed in their depiction of taboo subjects from adultery and poverty to crime



'I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. I unite with all who protest against them as a grave menace to youth, to home life, to country and to religion. I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land... Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality.'
Catholic Legion of Decency pledge

From the very beginnings of American cinema, the agents of moral uplift have regarded the medium with watchful wariness, alert to any indication that movies are, as they suspect, a pathway to cultural decay. In turn, leaders of the film industry have engaged in a continual strategy of self-regulation, fearful that grassroots community agitation would eventually find its way into legislative policy with disastrous effects on the moviemaking business. So it was with the creation of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1922, the Hays Code in 1930, and the establishment of the Motion Picture Association of America ratings system in 1968, but never did it have such a profound impact on Hollywood as with the formation of the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1934.

The phrase 'pre-Code' is bandied about so much in writing about film censorship that one would be forgiven for thinking it's a genre term. Historically, it refers to a specific period between the announcement of the Hays Code and the formation of the PCA to actually enforce it. Culturally, the interregnum represented a fertile few years in which the studios tested the outer limits of propriety with movies of increasing frankness and fearlessness.

Many histories of Hollywood say that movies provided an escape for Great Depression audiences looking to forget their troubles, but many of the films of the pre-Code era challenge that notion. Through the period, the studios

portrayed America with a realism previously unseen in its history. Warner Bros, with its stories "torn from today's headlines", was the most prominent practitioner, but even the more patrician MGM – with "more stars than there are in heaven" – was not averse to allowing the grim reality of daily life from seeping into the dream factory. Still, pre-Code cinema was perhaps a little too grim for some, for these films prompted a climactic battle over censorship, a conflict born in real-life scandal a dozen years earlier.

As 1922 dawned, the public image of the movie industry was taking a beating. The previous September, beloved comedian 'Fatty' Arbuckle was implicated in the rape and murder of actress Virginia Rappe in a San Francisco hotel during a party that was portrayed as a wild bacchanalia of sin and vice. Similar stories of drug- and alcohol-fuelled orgies filled the scandal rags. In February, director William Desmond Taylor would be murdered in his Los Angeles apartment, a case that remains unsolved to this day. The movies themselves were reaching a

In an effort to prove how serious they were about cleaning up their act, the moguls co-opted a symbol of moral rectitude, Will Hays



Puritan zeal: William Hays (second left)

narrative maturity, delving into subject matter that was adult in nature, worldly in outlook, and at times just plain racy (see, for example, any Cecil B. DeMille film starring Gloria Swanson).

Now, there is nothing that will focus the mind of industry barons like the threat of government oversight, and the studio chieftains of 1922 were no different. It didn't take long for the threat of Congressional investigation to reach the business offices in New York and the production lots in Los Angeles, so in an effort to prove how serious they were about cleaning up their own act, the film moguls co-opted an unimpeachable symbol of moral rectitude – a deacon in the Presbyterian church, former chair of the Republican party, campaign manager for Warren G. Harding's 1920 presidential campaign, and now postmaster general of the United States, Will Hays.

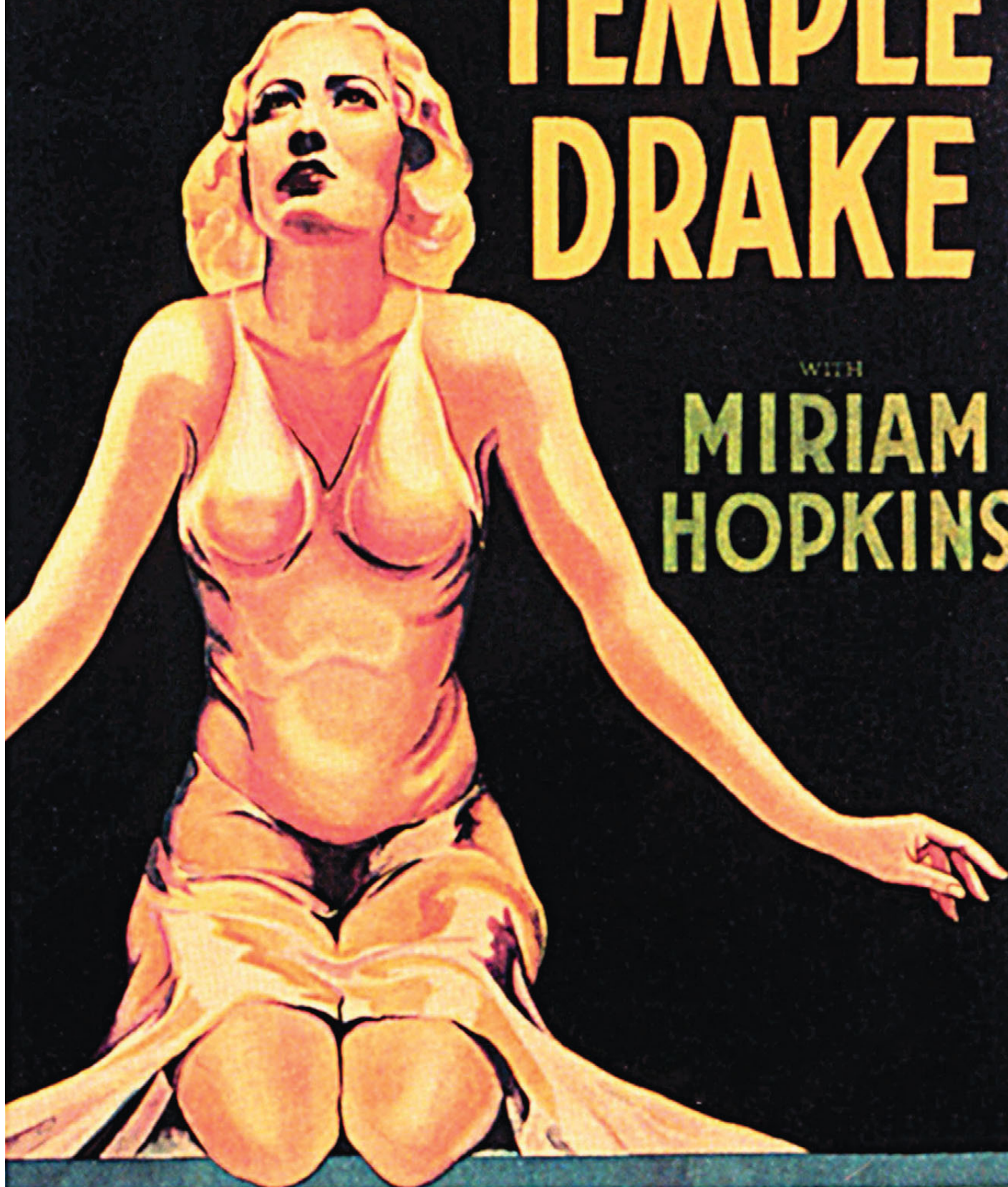
Hays was installed as head of the newly created MPPDA, and given the job of turning down the regulatory heat. This wasn't easy. Many states had their own censorship boards and standards varied wildly; what might pass muster in one state would be forbidden in another. To his credit, Hays managed to keep the bluenoses at bay for pretty much the whole of the 1920s. Working with the studios, clergy and various other reformer organisations, by decade's end he was ready to introduce the Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized and Silent Motion Pictures, a set of guidelines that became known formally as the Motion Picture Production Code, popularly as the Hays Code, and colloquially as the 'Don'ts and be carefules'. 'Don'ts' included such topics as profanity, sex hygiene, homosexuality, miscegenation and "ridicule of the clergy", while the much longer list of 'Be carefules' included showing sympathy for criminals, arson, surgical operations and "excessive or lustful kissing, particularly when one character or the other is a heavy".

So, between the Code and state censorship boards, one might expect that films produced after 1930 would be exemplars of wholesomeness and purity. In practice,



THE STORY of TEMPLE DRAKE

WITH
MIRIAM
HOPKINS



Fall from grace: one of the most daring pre-Code dramas, *The Story of Temple Drake* (1933) follows a Southern belle who is raped and forced into prostitution



Three's company: Ernst Lubitsch's *Design for Living* (1933) proved he was the master of the sex farce

the men who enforced the Code on behalf of the MPPDA (Jason Joy and James Wingate) were wholly ineffectual, primarily due to the very small staffs they were allotted to keep up with the work of reviewing scripts, treatments and finished films while battling studios that weren't especially thrilled by the bottleneck caused by the whole operation. The combination of bureaucratic sclerosis and the economic, political and cultural crisis brought about by the Great Depression ushered in a vibrant era of filmmaking and the introduction of many stars whose personas would forever be rooted in their pre-Code films.

No Hollywood studio captured the prevailing zeitgeist with the verve and flair of Warner Bros. Indeed, the way we tend to carry on about the studio's social consciousness films – gangster films *Little Caesar* (1930) and *The Public Enemy* (1931), chain-gang and jailhouse pictures *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932) and *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1932), social problem movies *Heroes for Sale* (1933) and *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933), and on and on – you'd think the studio made nothing but hard-hitting contemporary dramas. Let's not forget, however, that Depression-era Warners was also home to Joe E. Brown comedies, George Arliss biopics and Kay Francis melodramas, and the films for which we remember and celebrate the studio are in fact a distinct minority of their overall output – it would be wrong to label every film made between 1930 and 1934 as 'pre-Code'.

Still, those gritty dramas were important to the studio, linger in the collective imagination, and tend to be the subject of retrospectives. The list of films released by Warner Bros in 1933 that premiered at the Strand Theater in New York City and the Hollywood Theater in Los Angeles – the studio's biggest cinemas with almost identical seating capacities of 2,800 – is instructive. While there is the occasional outlier

such as *Mary Stevens, M.D.* with Kay Francis, the list is dominated by fare such as *20,000 Years in Sing Sing*, *Wild Boys of the Road*, *The Mayor of Hell* starring James Cagney, *The World Changes* with Paul Muni, and the studio's brilliant trio of Depression-saturated musicals: *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *42nd Street* and *Footlight Parade*.

The question remains: why? Why did Warners come to emphasise these sorts of films? There are plainly economic reasons: contemporary films didn't require elaborate costumes or set designs. There was also a feedback loop at work: audiences responded to particular films or publicity pitches and the studio answered with more of them. In the Warner Bros universe, audiences were presented with a picture of the world they knew (or at least thought they knew because they recognised things like modern cities, dress and moral codes), and in general the response was uniformly positive. The cycle began again.

Further, Warners was the Hollywood studio most supportive of the New Deal, that conglomeration of progressive economic programmes devoted to "relief, recovery, and reform" instituted in March 1933 by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration in response to the Great Depression. Some of this is attributable to the liberal political leanings of the brothers Warner – highly unusual for the owners of the means of production – but despite the socialistic trappings critics of Roosevelt's policies liked to attach to them, the Warner Bros version of the New Deal celebrated individual initiative even more than national unity and cooperative effort.

By 1933, Hays was being openly flouted and some railed against an industry that by their lights engaged in perversion for profit

Taxi! (1932) and *Employees' Entrance* (1932), for example, may be biting critiques of big business, but they could never be mistaken for a call to revolution; ultimately, they are every bit as pro-American as *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942).

Employees' Entrance stars Warren William, an actor who perfectly captured the era's cynical spirit by frequently portraying a debonair, amoral tyrant with a flair for commerce. But unlike Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, Barbara Stanwyck, William Powell and Carole Lombard, actors whose indelible screen personas were also established in the pre-Code era, William's career went into a steep decline after 1934. A similar fate befell Ruth Chatterton (star of 1933's *Female*, in which she plays the distaff version of a William tycoon) and, to a lesser extent, Miriam Hopkins (*Trouble in Paradise*, *Design for Living*, *The Story of Temple Drake*). Warner Bros never managed to find the right post-Code vehicles for William and Chatterton, while Hopkins's career was derailed as much by her difficult off-screen personality as by the roles she took.

By the time *Design for Living* was released in December 1933, the Hays Code was being openly flouted and some were beginning to wonder if it was worth the paper it was written on. They despaired at the illicit behaviour being glamorised on screen and railed against an industry that by their lights engaged in perversion for profit. Several grassroots organisations were founded to pressure the film industry, but none as powerful and influential as the Catholic Legion of Decency.

Founded by Cincinnati Archbishop John McNicholas earlier in 1933, the Legion was devoted to purifying cinema, asking its members to take a pledge promising to renounce all but the most virtuous of films, and even issuing its own ABC ratings system, with C (for 'condemned') reserved for the worst offenders. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to figure out what the Legion thought of a sin-fest such as *Baby Face* (1933), a film that helped prompt what can only be described as a Legion of Decency mania towards the end of 1933 and the beginning of 1934. New chapters sprung up across the country. The archbishop of Los Angeles – ground zero of all the tawdriness – lent his powerful voice. So many Protestants joined that the organisation's name was soon changed to the National Legion of Decency.

And the MPPDA got the message too. In mid-1934, a Catholic layman, Joseph Breen, was named head of the PCA and unlike his predecessors, he meant business. The Code was enforced, this time with an iron hand. Every film made by an MPPDA member was required to have a certificate of approval before release. As was also true with the Hays Code, studios were required to submit scripts to the PCA for review, but unlike before, the PCA wasn't shy about forcing the studios to make changes. So, in this sense, when we use the phrase 'pre-Code' as shorthand for films released in the early 1930s that feature content of a suggestive or provocative nature, we really mean 'pre-enforcement of the Hays Code'. The Code lasted well into the 1950s, when it finally collapsed under the weight of a postwar culture characterised by paranoia and world weariness. **S**

By Mike Mashon



Mob rule: *Little Caesar* (1930) paved the way for a flood of gangster dramas



Follow the leader: Gregory La Cava's *Gabriel over the White House* (1933)

1 The gangster 'Criminals should not be made heroes... The flaunting of weapons by gangsters will not be allowed...'

Forget sex, horror or portrayals of unruly mobs of the unemployed, it was the gangster film that provoked the greatest moral panic in Depression and Prohibition-era America. Though it wasn't the first American gangster feature, Mervyn LeRoy's *Little Caesar* was the first of the sound era, and had an incendiary impact, paving the way for William Wellman's *The Public Enemy* later the same year, Howard Hawks's *Scarface* (1932) and numerous other imitators – by one reckoning, more than 75 gangster films would go on to be made before the Code was enforced in 1934. With Al Capone and John Dillinger barely off the front pages, Edward G. Robinson's tightly wound, gun-totin' mobster

on the rise Rico Bandello exemplified the torn-from-the-headlines approach of Prohibition-era Warner Bros productions, and has cast his shadow on every onscreen anti-hero gangster since.

2 Horror 'Scenes of excessive brutality and gruesomeness must be cut to an absolute minimum...'

The pre-Code era saw the first great flowering of the American horror film, which fed off the social turmoil and psychological traumas of the age – from mobs brandishing flaming torches in James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) at Universal, to the Freudian psychologising and sexual perversity of Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) at Paramount. A taste for gruesomeness and cruelty courses through

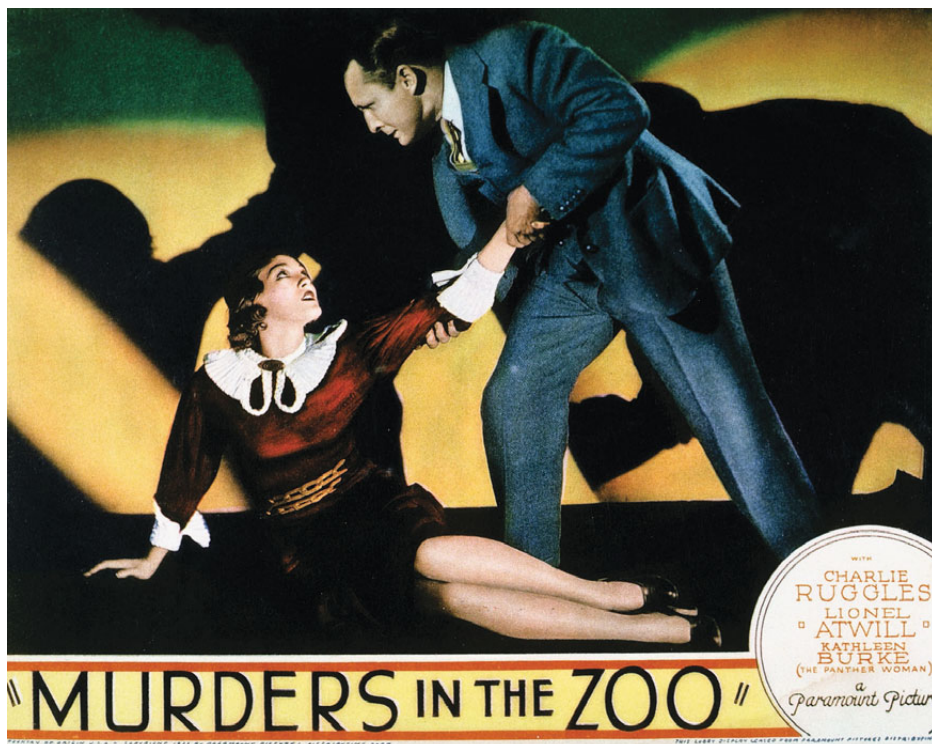
the veins of horror pictures in those years, whether in *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), *Doctor X* (1932), *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), *The Black Cat* (1934) or, with its opening scene so startlingly grisly that it still appals today, A. Edward Sutherland's Paramount production *Murders in the Zoo* (1933), in which Lionel Atwill plays a gleefully sadistic zoo owner who sees off competitors for wife Kathleen Burke's attentions by using his animals in ever more dastardly ways.

Burke is also in Erle C. Kenton's nightmarish *Island of Lost Souls* (1932), adapted from H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau*, which tramples unbridled through a string of taboos and, like *King Kong* (1933), evoked the documentary expeditionary films that were so popular in the period, and which brought back footage from exotic locations in faraway corners of the world.

3 Politics 'The use of the flag shall be consistently respectful...'

With President Hoover seemingly powerless to arrest the ravages of the Depression, one response was what Walter Lippmann termed a "hankering for supermen" – a desire for an authoritarian leader to take charge. As Thomas Doherty notes in his book *Pre-Code Hollywood*, such impulses worked their way into the so-called 'dictator craze' of pre-Code cinema. The tendency is apparent in such films as *Skyscraper Souls* (1932) and *Employees' Entrance*, in which the now almost forgotten 'King of the pre-Code' Warren William plays autocratic and downright immoral company bosses. But the most fascinating example must be Gregory La Cava's one-of-a-kind *Gabriel over the White House* (1933), in which Walter Huston plays an ineffectual president ill-equipped to deal with Depression-era America – until, that is, he survives a car crash and is visited by the angel Gabriel. When he awakes he is possessed of a messianic zeal and behaves like a populist dictator, a turn of events evidently endorsed by La Cava's film, which implicitly criticises President Hoover and America's political system.

An irreverence for the political establishment bursts through such



Bestial acts: A. Edward Sutherland's *Murders in the Zoo* (1933) has moments that still appal today

comedies as the Marx brothers' wisecracking *Duck Soup* (1933) and Wheeler and Woolsey's anarchic *Diplomaniacs* (1933), while the disillusionment with Hoover's administration even seeped in to such animations as Dave Fleischer's *Betty Boop for President* (1932), in which Betty throws her garter into the political ring, standing against 'Mr. Nobody' on a programme of "boop-oop-e-doop and chocolate ice cream".

4 The convict 'The courts of the land should not be presented as unjust...'

Though they typically involved men and women who are incarcerated unjustly, as Thomas Doherty has noted, pre-Code films set in the prisons, or 'big houses', of the north tended to depict them as places of solidarity amid the uncertainties of the Great Depression. MGM's *The Big House* (1930) ushered in a prison-film cycle that included Michael Curtiz's gritty 20,000 *Years in Sing Sing* for Warner Bros, in which Spencer Tracy plays hard-as-nails con Tommy Connors, whose spirit survives a 90-day stretch in solitary, but who faces a tougher test when a fair-minded warden lets him out on day release to visit his injured girlfriend Bette Davis.

The cycle extended into juvenile prison tales such as *The Mayor of Hell* with James Cagney, and women-in-prison titles such as *Ladies They Talk About* (1933) with Barbara Stanwyck, and *Paid* (1930) starring Joan Crawford. Many of these latter types of films offered other opportunities to test the Code, with, for instance, unclothed shower scenes or unmistakably lesbian inmates or guards (in contravention of the Code's insistence that so-called 'impure love' be kept off screens).

The most searing exposés of the prison system were reserved for the chain-gang pictures, which drew on sensational newspaper reports of brutality in the prison system of the rural Deep South. Warner Bros's *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), starring Paul Muni, was the most powerful and popular of the films, but the often shockingly raw RKO production *Hell's Highway* (1932) beat it to the punch. In it, tough con Richard Dix leads the fight against sadistic guards who brutalise their prisoners with chains, whips and the dreaded sweatboxes.

5 Forgotten men

Belying the received wisdom that the movies of the period offered mere escapism, the bitter realities of the Great Depression scarred many pre-Code films like angry sores, frightening the nation's moral guardians with scenes of bitter, dispossessed men. Warner Bros became the studio most associated with such gritty social commentaries, with titles such as William Wellman's very tough road movie *Wild Boys of the Road*, which follows the country's unemployed youth as they crossed the country in search of work. Almost neo-realist in its vivid, street-level portrait of a failing America, the film tested the Code in its angry cynicism at the inability of the government and its apparently corrupt institutions to deal with the unprecedented crisis.

As well as its effects on youth, the ravages of



Body heat: *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933) sees Joan Blondell unashamedly exploiting her sexuality

Some pre-Code era dramas can still seem startlingly frank in their exploration of the seedier side of American life

the Depression were particularly cruel to the country's Great War veterans, the "forgotten men" of the plaintive song in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Their plight is taken up by Wellman's *Heroes for Sale*, in which Richard Barthelmess plays a veteran who is systematically kicked down by an uncaring system. Bleak and uncompromising, with scenes of bread lines, violent mobs, unsympathetic judges and exploitative bankers – not to mention communist agitators – this is Depression-era America in the raw, the varnish stripped off.

6 Prostitution and fallen women 'Brothels and houses of ill-fame are not

proper locations for drama. They suggest to the average person at once sex sin, or they excite an unwholesome and morbid curiosity in the minds of youth...'

Stories concerning prostitution and 'fallen women' were a mainstay of the pre-Code period. They tend to split between unapologetic, comic tales of gold-diggers, and dramas that can still seem startlingly frank in their exploration of the seedier side of American life.

Many asked the question, as America awoke from the Roaring Twenties to face the sobering dawn of the early 1930s, of what would happen to the party girls now that the party was over? *Virtue* (1932), a brisk, tough drama, with a young Carole Lombard cast as a former prostitute trying to escape her past by marrying a tough-talking New York cabbie, offers one take on the theme, as in a different way does *The Story of Temple Drake* (1933), one of the most daring and sordid of all the pre-Code dramas. Miriam Hopkins is superb

as Temple Drake, a Southern belle with a wild, masochistic streak who is raped by a backwoods bootlegger and pushed into prostitution.

Lurid even by pre-Code standards, William Wellman's atmospheric proto-noir *Safe in Hell* (1931) is another exploration of the theme. It follows Gilda Karlson, a New Orleans 'escort' who hides out in a fleabag hotel on a Caribbean island after believing she has killed the man who forced her into prostitution, and has to constantly fend off the attentions of the lecherous reprobates who are also lying low in her hideout.

Even when prostitution isn't obviously suggested, the pursuit of other vices could bring women characters low. Among the rawest of all the pre-Code pictures, Mervyn LeRoy's *Three on a Match* (1932), about the varying fortunes of three women (Ann Dvorak, Joan Blondell and Bette Davis), crams a roll-call of forbidden themes into little more than an hour: infidelity, alcoholism, child abuse, gangsterism, undressing, drug use... The magnificent Dvorak steals the show as the lawyer's tragic wife who sinks into a life of vice and crime.

7 Bad girls

'Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing...'

Alongside the fallen women pictures were the so-called 'bad girl' films, in which women unashamedly profit from exploiting their sexuality, from the trio of dancers in *Gold Diggers of 1933* to Kay Francis and Lilyan Tashman in George Cukor's *Girls About Town* (1931). Mae West stands apart for the sheer bravado and confidence of her ribald wit in the likes of *I'm No Angel* (1933), and the real epitome of the bad girl was Jean Harlow, the reigning sex symbol of the early 1930s and one of the defining faces of the pre-Code era, in pictures such as *Platinum Blonde* (1931) for Columbia, and *Red Dust* (1932) and *Red-Headed Woman* (1932) for MGM. In the scandalous latter film Harlow plays the funny, volatile Lil 'Red' Andrews, an unapologetic gold-digger who knows that sex pays and that men like Chester Morris are buying. With a terrific script by Anita Loos, the film would test the boundaries with scenes of semi-nudity, adultery and violence.

Perhaps the most outrageous pre-Code of them all, *Baby Face*, was made over at Warner Bros, largely in response to *Red-Headed Woman*'s provocations. Stanwyck is in peerless form as Lily, who escapes a squalid upbringing and an abusive father and moves to New York determined to use what she's got to get what she wants, sleeping her way to the very top of a major bank. It was so troubling to the censors that it was cut by five minutes even before the Code was enforced; the full-length pre-release version was only rediscovered by Mike Mashon in the Library of Congress archives in 2005.

8 Musicals

'Dancing costumes cut to permit indecent actions or movements are wrong... Dances suggesting or representing sexual actions or indecent passion are forbidden...'

Along with *Footlight Parade* and *42nd Street*, *Gold Diggers of 1933* is the ultimate early-1930s musical, which never lets us forget that



Stars and bars: Bette Davis and Spencer Tracy in prison drama *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1932)



Land of the lost: *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933) follows unemployed American youth searching for work



Working girl: *Virtue* (1932) stars Carole Lombard (right) as a former prostitute trying to escape her past



behind the razzamatazz genius of Busby Berkeley's spectacular productions, the daring of its revealing costumes, the suggestive wit of its dialogue and the great charm of its stars, lay the realities of the Great Depression. The pre-Code buttons are all pressed with glee, as its trio of wisecracking showgirl 'gold-diggers', played by Blondell, Aline MacMahon and Ruby Keeler, use all of their wiles to enjoy the good life. The songs are unforgettable and in themselves test the Code's resolve, whether in the hilariously naughty 'Pettin' in the Park' or the sobering and powerful 'Remember my Forgotten Man'.

9 Adultery and the sanctity of marriage
'Adultery as a subject should be avoided... It is never a fit subject for comedy. Thru comedy of this sort, ridicule is thrown on the essential relationships of home and family and marriage, and illicit relationships are made to seem permissible, and either delightful or daring.'

In *The Divorcée* (1930), Norma Shearer gives an Oscar-winning performance as a young society woman whose response to the discovery of her husband Chester Morris's infidelity is to have an affair of her own, which prompts him to declare that while his own "doesn't mean a thing", her infidelity "isn't the same". Throughout the pre-Code era we find films that confront that sexual double standard, such as *Illicit* (1931), in which Barbara Stanwyck declares that all of her friends are either unhappily married or unhappily divorced, leading her to the conclusion that "marriage is disastrous to love". More often than not though, the theme came through in comedies. One such is William Dieterle's delightfully amoral *Jewel Robbery* (1932), in which Kay Francis plays a Viennese woman who has married a dull man for his money – not that it stops her taking lovers on the side. When one of her many shopping trips to a jeweller's is rudely interrupted by William Powell's impeccably urbane jewel thief, it's love at first sight...

But it was Ernst Lubitsch who was the



Love at first sight: Kay Francis and William Powell in the delightfully amoral *Jewel Robbery* (1932)

unquestioned master of the sex farce, whether in racy musicals starring Maurice Chevalier, such as *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931) and *One Hour with You* (1932), or his version of *Design for Living* (1933), Noel Coward's play about, in his words, "three people who love each other very much". Ben Hecht's pre-Code screenplay replaced almost all of Coward's dialogue with his own gloriously risqué wit, and here we find the Lubitsch touch at its naughtiest, with Gary Cooper and Fredric March entering into a "gentleman's agreement" with Miriam Hopkins that there will be "no sex" in their relationship with her. "But," she soon reminds them, "I am no gentleman!" Then there

Like many pre-Codes, 'Taxi!' is fascinating in the way it captures the diverse accents and ethnicities in the US in a way later films lost

is what for many is Lubitsch's most perfect film, *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) – the tale of courting crooks Miriam Hopkins and Herbert Marshall and their plot to relieve heiress Kay Francis of her riches. Samson Raphaelson's dialogue crackles with pre-Code wit and subversion, as when Kay Francis muses that "marriage is a beautiful mistake made by two people".

10 Corrupt business
 Where in the 1920s the businessman seemed to represent all that was great about the American way, in the early 1930s his flaunted wealth seemed more grotesque than grand, and that new view was expressed in many pre-Code pictures which paint big business as corrupt. Warren William was particularly effective when playing unscrupulous businessmen in his headline roles in *The Match King* (1932) and *Skyscraper Souls* (1932). But it's *Employees' Entrance* that is his defining performance. He's deliciously wicked as the tyrannical boss of a New York department store who abuses his position to corrupt the ladies in his employ, whether it's good-time gal Alice White ("Oh, it's you. I didn't know you with all your clothes on"), or a young and innocent Loretta Young.

The part finds a female equivalent in Ruth Chatterton's character in Michael Curtiz's *Female*. Like William, Chatterton's star waned after the Code was enforced, but she's a riot in *Female*, playing the president of an automobile company who is as decisive in the bedroom as she is in the boardroom.

In Roy Del Ruth's rough and ready and very fast *Taxi!* (1932), James Cagney plays an independent cabbie with a hair-trigger temper who's caught in a turf war with a bullying, larger rival company run in mob-like fashion. Through an ad hoc drivers' union, he hooks up with Sue (Loretta Young), whose cabbie father was killed by the same rivals. Like many pre-Codes, *Taxi!* is fascinating for the way it captures the diverse accents, languages and ethnicities of US cities in a way that later films lost, with Cagney himself speaking Yiddish in an early scene. ⑨

By James Bell



Driving force: Loretta Young and James Cagney in Roy Del Ruth's corruption drama *Taxi!* (1932)

CHANGING OF THE GUARD



The big sleaze: *Employees' Entrance* (1932) stars 'King of the pre-Code' Warren William in his defining performance, with Alice White

A new roster of stars shot to fame in the pre-Code era, but some soon started to flounder in the clampdown that followed

By Dan Callahan

For five hot and heavy years, from roughly 1929 to 1934, many American talking films were a welter of sexual frankness, perversity and outright licentiousness, and they needed stars to match that mood. Yet in the changeover from silent to speaking films in the first full year of talkies, some strange switches were made. Clara Bow, certainly the sexiest and most spontaneous of all female silent stars, was suffering from nerves and self-consciousness before the start of her first talkie, Dorothy Arzner's *The Wild Party* (1929), and her fears only increased when Paramount bigwigs sent the 36-year-old stage star Ruth Chatterton over to Bow's house to give her some elocution lessons. "I beat it out the back door," Bow later told Louise Brooks.

On the set of *The Wild Party*, Bow kept staring nervously up at the microphone during her scenes, and Arzner would have to call, "Cut" and gently take her aside to explain the problem. Bow tried her best, but the 'wild' party of the title is far more inhibited than it would have

been just a year earlier in blessed and dreamy silence. Though she was only 24, Bow's career began to peter out due to bad movies and bad publicity, while Chatterton won an Oscar nomination in 1929 for her performance in the mother-love weepie *Madame X* (1929). Bow is clearly anxious but still very appealing in *The Wild Party*, while Chatterton is all but unwatchable in *Madame X*, giving her entire performance with her grand, hollow voice and not bothering to hide the boredom on her face.

One of the oddest things about this pre-Code period, which is famous now for its sexual verve, is that the Hollywood studios had to shed most of their hottest sex stars like Bow in exchange

for theatre headliners such as Chatterton, Ann Harding, Ina Claire and Helen Hayes, pros whose technical command suggested that they were thinking over what they would be having for dinner while they suffered and did monologues on the telephone. Luckily, not all of the theatre imports of this time were as above-it-all as these ladies. Kay Francis and Miriam Hopkins had acquired polish on the stage, but they were clearly women who enjoyed sex and thrived in sexually confident environments—whether comic, as in their joint appearance in Ernst Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise*, or gothic, as in Hopkins's daring portrayal of sexual masochism in *The Story of Temple Drake*, one of the films that particularly bothered bluenoses right before the Code lowered the lid on sex.

If there is one star who is almost an emanation of the pre-Code ethos, it would have to be Warren William, an actor so grossly seedy and leering that he could only have found lead roles at Warner Bros, a studio where all bets were off. William played chiselling businessmen and lawyers and private dicks, and he looked like he was dedicated to acquiring every possible venereal disease. Biographer and ace gossip Lawrence J. Quirk reported that William "had an erection 90 per cent of the time and had to wear special crotch supports to disguise the fact—not always successfully". That sounds



Clara Bow (right) in *The Wild Party* (1929)



Going up: Barbara Stanwyck in the most outrageous pre-Code film of them all, *Baby Face* (1933)

medically unlikely, but just look at a photo of William's face and judge for yourself.

Better yet, watch William in one of his films and see unflappable types like Joan Blondell and the young Bette Davis shrink in the face of his sexual rapaciousness. During filming of *The Dark Horse* (1932), Davis complained to director Alfred E. Green that William was turning every kiss he gave her in the picture into groping sessions just below camera. While touring with William to promote the film, Davis had to call on her first husband to threaten the lecherous actor into behaving himself, but she still had to put up with his staring. "They say looks can kill," Davis said. "Well looks can undress too, believe you me." Even wide-eyed sweetheart Loretta Young is made to give in to William's outrageous sexual harassment in *Employees' Entrance*.

It has been much remarked upon that stars such as Young and George Brent and others who put most of us to sleep in their post-Code films show a surprising amount of life and dimension in their pre-Code films. Those who would dismiss Young in her post-Code work might do well to see her in *Employees' Entrance*, where the hardness of her voice reveals the tough operator she actually was. Brent, who was married to Ruth Chatterton in the early 1930s, actually brings her to life starring opposite her in films such as *The Rich Are Always with Us* (1932), *The Crash* (1932) and the oddball *Female*, which treats feminism as if it were a science-fiction concept. Warners had taken on Chatterton from Paramount and she gained energy from its freewheeling, penny-pinching pace, so that her brusque professional indifference began to seem stylish and intriguing. When that studio took on stage players for their movies, they grabbed actors such as James

Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Blondell and Davis – no-nonsense, stylised, carbonated performers, who were rigged to explode in every other scene.

Robinson was a character actor from the theatre, and in his first talking films, Robert Florey's *The Hole in the Wall* (1929) and Mervyn LeRoy's *Little Caesar*, he brought a new kind of presence to the screen: watchful, snarling and sometimes overtly sadomasochistic. Cagney only amplified these qualities, bringing out an explosive sexual hunger for women that made him whinny and dance all over the screen. He is famous for pushing a grapefruit in poor Mae Clarke's face in *The Public Enemy* (1931) and

pushing other women around on screen as a prelude to rough sex, but he also revealed the tenderness that lay just underneath his horniness in *Blonde Crazy* (1931), where he longs for Blondell in the most vulnerable possible way.

Of all the actors under contract to Warners in the early 1930s, none was as expressive of pre-Code freedom as Barbara Stanwyck. She played party girls and working girls, girls who danced with men for a dime, and girls who would sleep with men without the benefit of a marriage licence, as in *Illicit* (1931), a film that was remade two years later for Bette Davis as *Ex-Lady* (1933). Stanwyck is a woman who seems to know all about sex, too much in fact, though she seems genuinely surprised by the lesbianism of female jailbirds in *Ladies They Talk About* (1932). In Frank Capra's *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1932), she explores sexual repulsion and attraction for a Chinese warlord (Nils Asther) until repulsion and attraction blur to become the same earth-shaking, orgasmic feeling. And in the ultimate pre-Code movie, *Baby Face*, Stanwyck serves up the nihilism of a sexually abused woman who cynically sleeps her way up the social ladder. Stanwyck herself was allowed to contribute her own ideas to the script by producer Darryl Zanuck, and those script sessions must have been colourful, to say the least.

A thought: did Stanwyck's friend Joan Crawford see *Baby Face*, and if so, what did she think of it? Stanwyck knew about sexual careerism, but Crawford lived it as a chorus girl and then as an *ingénue* and rising star at her home studio of MGM, where the films had a patina of class and careful, sometimes stuffy, production values. When Crawford plays a man's mistress, as she does in *Possessed* (1931), or a stenographer tempted by sexual quid pro quo, as she does in *Grand Hotel* (1932), she steadfastly resists the reality of the situation and substitutes her own fantasy of herself instead, a gallant lady who would never let sordid reality touch the hem of her fantastical Adrian garments. Cast as an outright hooker in *Rain* (1932), Crawford created a downright bizarre portrait of a sexual woman,



Slave to love: Clark Gable and Norma Shearer in *A Free Soul* (1931)

all fishnets and heavy make-up, as if she needed to get into drag of some kind on screen to even touch the idea of sex for money or just sex for pleasure.

Norma Shearer, the wife of MGM production chief Irving Thalberg, had to pose for some sexy stills for photographer George Hurrell before she could persuade her husband to let her star in *The Divorcée* (1930), which began a series of films for her in which she played women tempted by sex. Shearer was an affected actress whose hand-flapping, artificial mannerisms could be maddening, but in one movie, *A Free Soul* (1931), she offered as frank a portrait of sexual hunger as has ever been seen on film. All Shearer's usual behavioural nonsense falls away as she explores the idea of becoming a kind of sex slave to a gangster played by Clark Gable. Dressed in a gold dressing gown that plunges as far as possible in the front and opens all the way up her thighs, Shearer offers several lingering pictures of libidinal wantonness that would have brought a deep flush to the cheeks of her later respectable post-Code heroines.

Gable was undisputed sex king of this period, manhandling all the MGM women from Shearer to Crawford to Garbo and making them quiver with fear and anticipation (cast as a villain over at Warners in 1931's *Night Nurse*, he even violently roughed up Stanwyck). Gable found his soul mate on screen in Jean Harlow, a girl who had grown fast from stilted bombshell in Howard Hughes's *Hell's Angels* (1930) and William Wellman's *The Public Enemy* to all-out vamp and comic pro in *Red-Headed Woman*, in which she gets slapped in the face and cries, "Do it again! I like it! Do it again!" In just a year, Harlow had gone from being laughed at to being laughed with, and she excelled in *Red Dust* (1932) with Gable, both in a fairly decorous nude scene in a barrel and in the more dramatic moments when she feels betrayed by his interest in a married woman (the smart and horny Mary Astor).

Of all the stars who felt a crimp in their style with the Production Code clampdown in 1934, none suffered more than Harlow, who was made to feel bad about herself in the very unpleasant *The Girl from Missouri* (1934) and several vehicles thereafter in which she suffered and repented. Anyone who has gloried in the epigrammatic, healthy filth of Mae West in *She Done Him Wrong* (1933) and *I'm No Angel* (1933) can only deplore the cleaned-up little jokes she is forced to deliver in *Belle of the Nineties* (1934), which prove that 'clean' humour is the enemy of humour. Marlene Dietrich could not be stymied by censorship – they could not censor the gleam in her eye, the smile on her face, the teasing promise in her voice. But Stanwyck seems cranky and bewildered by the encroaching stuffiness of her initial post-Code movies, such as *Gambling Lady* (1934) and *The Woman in Red* (1935), which feel like hastily assembled girdles she is supposed to fit herself into, all guts removed and replaced by laced-up fear and tip-toeing nervousness.

It took Stanwyck several years before screwball comedy and then *film noir* regained her the ground she had lost under censorship. Cagney went from sexual gangsters and bad boys to playing an FBI suit in "*G-Men*" (1935) and too many formula movies with Pat O'Brien. You can



Some like it hot: Clark Gable with his screen soul mate Jean Harlow in *Red Dust* (1932)

be sure that a pre-Code Cagney would not have bothered faking fear of execution to provide an example to wayward Dead End Kids as he does in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938). Only in *White Heat* (1949) is he allowed the full complexity of his pre-Code work. As late as 1955, in *Love Me or Leave Me*, it is clear that punches are being pulled when it comes to Cagney's coerced sexual relationship with Doris Day. If he had played that part in 1931, there would have been no questions about that relationship, or easy answers.

The Production Code crackdown of 1934 also created many stars while clipping the wings of pre-Code trailblazers. Performers who had

Anyone who has gloried in the healthy filth of Mae West in 'I'm No Angel' can only deplore her cleaned-up jokes a few years later



'When I'm bad, I'm better': Mae West

been idling for years, such as Carole Lombard, Myrna Loy, Jean Arthur and Ginger Rogers finally became big names in screwball comedy, a genre that was a creative reaction to the ban on the depiction of sex, which was built into a frustrated subtext for farce. Stars such as Irene Dunne and Claudette Colbert also sprang to full life in this new genre of films, as did Cary Grant, who had been wasting his time for many years at Paramount playing edgy, well-dressed guys without ever finding a real screen character.

But the Code stranglehold of 1934 was a disaster in many ways, and it ruined many films. Just look at the end of *The Letter* (1940) to see the absurdity of the notion that 'crime must not pay': murderer Bette Davis is killed by her rival Gale Sondergaard, who is then immediately stopped with her accomplice by police. Little demon Rhoda Penmark (Patty McCormack) must be struck by lightning at the end of *The Bad Seed* (1956). These endings piled up until the early 1960s, when the Code had relaxed enough to allow Stanwyck to play a lesbian madam in *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962). Miraculously, Stanwyck still seems as frank yet existentially distant about sex as she does in her pre-Code films. On her face in that movie is the knowledge that representation and censorship go in cycles but the reality of life remains the same no matter how much you try to tidy it up, blunt it or hide it. ☹

i The Deep Focus programme 'Hollywood Babylon: Early Talkies Before the Censor' runs at BFI Southbank, London, throughout May, with an introductory lecture by Mike Mashon on 2 May. A complementary season of films runs in the BFI Southbank's 'Passport to Cinema' strand until the end of July

GOD'S LONELY MAN

John Michael McDonagh's follow-up to 'The Guard' tells the blackly comic tale of a rural Irish priest who is threatened with death by a vengeful parishioner. Here, the director outlines his influences, including Hitchcock, Melville, Bresson... and 'Home and Away'

By Trevor Johnston



PHOTOGRAPH BY EYEVINE

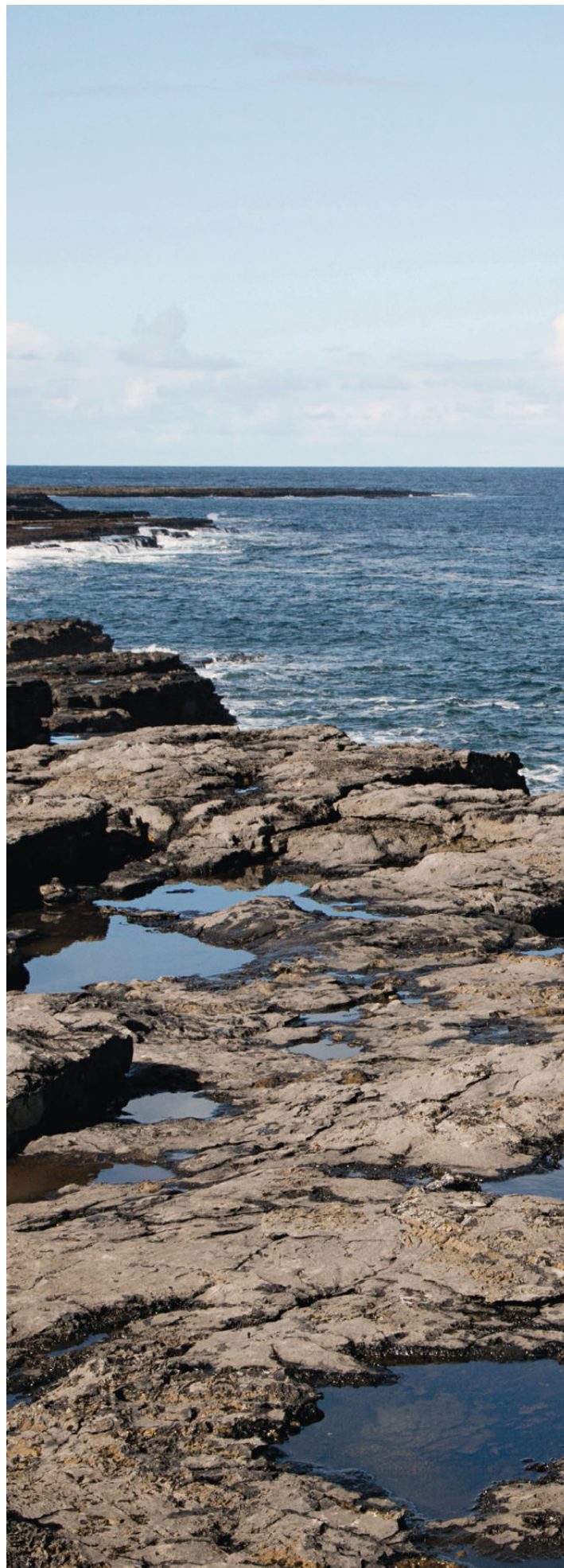
MARKED FOR DEATH
Brendan Gleeson stars as the good priest Father James (right) in *Calvary* by John Michael McDonagh (above), a black comedy that addresses profoundly serious spiritual and philosophical issues

How to explain the nervous laughter with which the audience greets the opening scene of *Calvary*? We're in the confession box of a rural Irish church and we see only the benign yet somehow worldly expression of Brendan Gleeson's Father James, reacting with initial incredulity and deepening anxiety when the voice on the other side of the screen threatens to murder him: "Killing a priest on a Sunday, that would be a good one now."

It's a line that generates a few edgy chuckles, yet killing is clearly no laughing matter. Nor indeed is the would-be murderer's motivation, since his confession reveals that he was sexually abused as a child by a priest who remained beyond justice and has since died – leaving a damaged life whose unresolved rage can now only be salvaged by a gratuitous act of vengeance against the church. Not to kill a bad priest, but to kill a good one.

The camera stays on Gleeson's expression as he struggles to ascertain the credibility of what he's hearing, grasp the reality of having just a week to live – and indeed surmise the identity of the would-be perpetrator. John Michael McDonagh's script thus generates powerful intrigue that is to sustain it over the next 90-odd minutes. Not so much a whodunnit as a whosgonnadoit, the whole scenario is very much a movie construct like some flip-side version of Hitchcock's *I Confess*, yet it's also a story drawn from the awful realities of the headlines in Ireland and across the world. Perhaps, in the end, our nervous laughter suggests it's easier to respond to the artifice of the set-up than confront the ramifications of its real-world inspiration.

"I thought there would be a whole raft of films dealing with this subject," admits writer-director McDonagh, who completed the script for *Calvary* during the extended edit of his first feature, the skewed Galway-set cop movie *The Guard* (2011), and explains that the idea first came up during the shoot on Ireland's





✶ windswept west coast. “We were in the pub with Brendan Gleeson one night, talking about the stuff everywhere in the news, and how filmmakers would respond to it. Yet Brendan was saying how he’d had a mentor at a young age, someone very important in his life, who was actually a good priest. He felt that they’ve now all been tarred by the same brush, which got me thinking that maybe a film about a good priest would be a way in to the subject, because it would be exactly the opposite from what people would be expecting.”

Indeed, it’s certainly true to say that the unfolding of Father James’s fortunes, which encompasses a whole Sligo community of suspects and oddballs – from a disgraced financier (Dylan Moran) to a world-weary pathologist (Aidan Gillen), bolshy African immigrant (Isaach de Bankolé) and cynical butcher (Chris O’Dowd) – marks a richer, more character-driven terrain than the genre-savvy malarkey of *The Guard*. For one thing, the female characters are a lot stronger, given Kelly Reilly’s effectively understated turn as the priest’s troubled daughter from a previous marriage, and the telling presence of Marie-Josée Croze as a holidaying Frenchwoman dealing with her own sudden bereavement. Moreover, the drama’s driven not by the desire to make play with Hollywood policier and buddy-movie conventions like its predecessor, but to explore with insight and sincerity various live moral issues – how can we believe in the possibility of good when those in the church whom we trusted have betrayed us so grievously?

“If you did this story straight, it’s a horror movie,” contends McDonagh, speaking from his South London home after spending the early part of the year on the festival trail with the film in Sundance and Berlin. “I don’t think any of us could take that. And after you’ve seen docs like [Alex Gibney’s] *Mea Maxima Culpa*, you’ve seen enough – and I mean that in a good way. So you have to approach it in an oblique manner. I wouldn’t describe *Calvary* as an anti-religious film, it’s more of an anti-authority film, which is something it shares with *The Guard*.”

In *The Guard* we were drawn to Gleeson’s Gerry Boyle because of his willingness to dance to his own tune even if it meant rubbing his supposed superiors up the wrong way with his comic patter. Here, however, Gleeson’s man of the cloth – again performed with aplomb but with significantly more gravitas – is an island of decency in a community that runs the gamut from self-interest to outright hostility. McDonagh, then, had to square up to the challenge of circumventing the audience’s understandable wariness towards any post-abuse-scandal story that dares to see its priestly protagonist in a positive light, as he sought to create a genuinely good character in the process.

“One of the guiding forces for me was trying not to make one of those hipster, ironic movies where nobody means anything,” McDonagh continues. “Father James is a man who truly believes. He may have some physical fear about the end that awaits him, but I don’t think he has any spiritual doubt. For some people that will make him heroic, but others will consider him an idiot for having faith in any of that stuff. It’s a film which could be seen by true believers or atheists and each could take something from it. I watched Melville’s *Léon Morin, prêtre* [1961] again, and although I’m more drawn to his thrillers, the way the Belmondo character is so charismatic, is

If you did this story straight, it’s a horror movie. I don’t think any of us could take that. So you have to approach it in an oblique manner

unafraid of sexuality, and so absolutely sincere, I’m sure some of that must have steeped into *Calvary*.”

Where Joel Silver and Marty Brest appeared the guiding angels in *The Guard*, here McDonagh’s array of deliciously articulate supporting turns suggests a strong influence from his boyhood love of Preston Sturges, though for viewers who can get past the resonances with *I Confess* (which McDonagh claims is “seriously underrated”), there’s surely more than a *souçon* of Bresson in the mix. McDonagh has the chutzpah to repurpose a key moment from *Pickpocket* for his own highly effective ends, and *Diary of a Country Priest* remains an obvious point of comparison.

“Or maybe Brendan’s the donkey from *Au hasard, Balthazar* – he certainly gets knocked about a bit,” laughs McDonagh, who revisited *Diary of a Country Priest* just before the shoot and was startled by how much of Bresson’s 1950 Bernanos adaptation had lingered in his subconscious from a single viewing three decades previously. “The similarities were startling, especially the plot, because everyone in the village hates the priest. But in Bresson the priest is so naive and I got rid of all that. Father James has been married, he’s had a kid, he’s been an alcoholic, which for me makes him a more complete personality and someone you’d be more likely to listen to. The problem with the priesthood is that so many of them have come straight from the seminary and they know nothing about life.”

At which point, sceptical cinephiles might well be wondering why a filmmaker with but two features to his name should blithely be dropping the names of the cinematic great and the good into his conversation. It’s a fair point but one that gets to the heart of McDonagh’s rather singular route to filmmaking and how it’s made him something of a misfit in terms of the British and Irish industries. Here, essentially, is someone who hasn’t worked his way up from third camera assistant, hasn’t earned his directorial spurs on the small screen and hasn’t gone to film school. Instead, after their parents returned to Ireland leaving them to look after their house in Camberwell, John Michael sat on the sofa with his younger brother Martin and watched movies on TV – a lot of movies on TV. Martin subsequently started writing plays since he reckoned it would be easier to break in to theatre than film, and his pitch-dark tales of rural Ireland went



BE NATIONAL ARCHIVE (C)



on to win every award going, even making him the first playwright since Shakespeare to have four productions running simultaneously in London. Unsurprisingly, the film world then came calling and after an Oscar-winning short, *Six Shooter*, in 2004, Martin got the chance to direct his script for the shaggy-dog gangster thriller *In Bruges* in 2007, to much critical and commercial acclaim.

Meanwhile, John Michael had been busy writing too, though selling his script for *Ned Kelly* (2003) proved something of a false start when the Gregor Jordan-directed Heath Ledger vehicle turned out to be a serious misfire, prompting him to take on directing duties himself for his debut feature *The Guard*, notwithstanding his relative inexperience behind the camera. Perhaps understandably, much of what's been written about John Michael thus far raises the issue of sibling rivalry but the older McDonagh now says that his own success has smoothed out the balance of their relationship. "We don't read each other's scripts but we do look at each other's early cuts at the editing stage when you need fresh input from someone you respect. And nowadays, any residual tensions between us we sort out on the tennis court.

"But what you do have to remember," he adds, "is that just about everything in my career goes back to basically being a shut-in until the age of 25. All the films I soaked in during that time, they've somehow filtered right in there, so now I'm trying to get myself into a situation where I can get to collaborate with people whose work I admired in the past, like getting a chance to cast M. Emmet Walsh from the Coens' *Blood Simple*. Somehow I imagine they're going to be great to go out drinking with on a Friday night, and thankfully that's proved to be the case thus far."

You could say there's something of the confidence of the autodidact about him, but while he's justifiably proud of his two features, he's still more than capable of self-deprecation. A query about whether a certain montage in *Calvary* was inspired by Fellini's *I Vitelloni*, for instance, is countered with the unabashed assertion that he stole from *Home and Away* instead, since he still keeps

tabs on the long-running Aussie TV soap. "They do this thing where they'll catch up the characters at a suitable dramatic movement and give you this little lateral movement across the actors' faces. I thought that would work for me too, so that's why it's in there."

His are definitely personal works, reflecting his background as an avid movie fan, and somehow existing outside the various categories into which British and Irish films tend to fit these days. *The Guard* and *Calvary* have little to do with social realism and, while they're definitely not purist arthouse fare, nor are they straightforward commercial propositions. So where then does McDonagh fit in?

"Early on in my writing career I suffered because I fell between arthouse and mainstream, and there's really no way I could have made *Calvary* as my first feature, even though there's a certain amount of humour in there to sweeten the pill. The bottom line for me is that it's really boring writing a script, sitting there for three or four hours a day churning this stuff out. I try to entertain myself, which is why the characters talk in the way they do, which has got absolutely nothing to do with naturalism. You put together enjoyable plots and charismatic actors, and hopefully that gets you round the ghettoisation of Irish film, and the kind of despair you sometimes feel as an audience member. Any time I see the words 'a little gem' on a film poster, my heart just sinks..."

"Not that I would really consider myself as an Irish filmmaker. I've spent the bulk of my life in London, after all, though I'm hardly an English filmmaker either. After these last two features though, I've pretty much said what I have to say about Irish subject matters for a while. The plan is for the next couple of projects to happen in America, since I really want to expose myself to a different way of working, a new crew, new heads of department, American actors. And if it turns out to be a nightmare, I can always come back. I feel like I've travelled a long way already." ☺



Calvary is released in the UK on 11 April and is reviewed on page 69

FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS
Hitchcock's *I Confess* (bottom left) was a key influence on *Calvary*, in which Dylan Moran plays Michael Fitzgerald (above left), a financier who fancies himself as a man of culture yet values nothing; and Kelly Reilly plays Fiona, the daughter of Father James (above right)

FORBIDDEN FRUIT: THE WILD ALCHEMY OF WALERIAN BOROWCZYK

The late Polish director may have alienated some critics with his idiosyncratic career trajectory – travelling from masterful short animations and the visual poetry of his early features ‘Goto, Isle of Love’ and ‘Blanche’ to the dismal softcore travesty of ‘Emmanuelle 5’ – but his perverse, confrontational narratives are now ripe for reappraisal

By David Thompson

‘The subject of my films is just a pretext. It’s their rhythm and the unfolding of a created world which is consistent’

Few filmmakers have aroused such controversy in their time as Polish-born Walerian Borowczyk (1923–2006). Much of it derived from disappointment that a great talent allowed himself to be consumed by the basest aspects of the film industry. Borowczyk’s early animated films, such as the magnificent *Angels’ Games* (*Les Jeux des anges*, 1964), were garlanded with prizes and offered up as examples of the true artistic potential of cinema. His first features, *Goto, Isle of Love* (*Goto, l’île d’amour*, 1969) and especially *Blanche* (1971) were celebrated for their visual poetry and powerful, fable-like storytelling. The director, with no apparent reference to traditional film language, had created worlds in which human behaviour in all its cruelty and passion was observed with immense precision and tenderness. He might be labelled a surrealist, but really he stood apart from any obvious school or tradition.

Then, taking advantage of the relaxed censorship of the 1970s, Borowczyk took the bold step in *Immoral Tales* (*Contes immoraux*, 1974) of foregrounding the erotic obsessions latent in his early work. The film, composed of four separate episodes, dwelt on nudity and sexual activity, observed unflinchingly and yet with the witty eye of an artistic connoisseur, and was a challenge both to the censors and the arthouse audience. But it was a commercial success, and thereafter Borowczyk unrepentantly ploughed on to deliver more and more perverse and confrontational narratives, with the outrage of *The Beast* (*La Bête*, 1975) followed by Sylvia Kristel and Joe Dallesandro as besotted whore and client in *La Marge* (*The Streetwalker*, 1976), and – in his last film to be seen in UK cinemas – a version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which took no prison-

ers in amoral carnality and violence. Borowczyk’s films were often censored and relegated to the shabbier end of the cinema chain, or simply remained unseen.

It’s only recently, with the original versions of Borowczyk’s films becoming available in digital formats, and – in the case of all the French films up to *The Beast* – being beautifully restored, that it’s become possible to look at his work as a whole, just as the director would have wished. His influence upon many film-makers, in particular the Quay brothers and Terry Gilliam, has been profound and continues to spread. Of course, Borowczyk’s visual language, his precise use of the frame and alchemical brilliance in putting image to music, have found more artistic acceptance than his single-minded obsession with human sexuality. His shameless fascination with the female body will never win him support in certain quarters, but perhaps now it can be seen as a liberating and celebratory viewpoint. While his heroines at first tended to have been heavily victimised, he became more and more drawn to narratives in which they triumphed. To be sure, the career diminished as the market for erotic cinema faltered, and Borowczyk, who poured his energies into many ambitious but unfulfilled projects (such as the life of Nefertiti), failed to find a satisfactory way back. But we are the luckier for now having access again to the amazing theatre of Mr Boro.

i A career retrospective, ‘Cinemas of Desire: The Films of Walerian Borowczyk’, runs as part of the 12th Kinoteka Polish Film Festival at BFI Southbank, London, throughout May. An exhibition and season of short films, ‘Walerian Borowczyk: The Listening Eye’, is showing at the ICA, London, from 20 May to 29 June. *Camera Obscura: The Films of Walerian Borowczyk*, a DVD/Blu-ray box-set from Arrow, is released in the UK on 30 June





THE ARTIST

'If one makes films, it isn't in order to continue painting. On the contrary, it's precisely in order to change the means of expression and to do what is impossible in painting'

Borowczyk was born in 1923 near Poznań, one of Poland's oldest cities, located in the west of the country close to the German border. His father worked on the railways but was privately an accomplished post-impressionist artist. The young Walerian, evidently inspired by his example, trained as a painter and lithographer, entering the Kraków Academy of Fine Art in 1949 and finding himself alongside another gifted student, Andrzej Wajda. A national prize for lithography, and the abandonment of socialist realism as an official aesthetic, led Borowczyk to produce a sequence of distinctive film posters. Poster art was widely seen in Poland in this period and had a huge cultural impact.

Although Borowczyk found his true vocation with the moving image, he continued all his life to practise his artisanal skills, creating wooden sculptures, sketches and gouaches, and most notoriously, a collection of erotic objects and devices that masqueraded as vintage originals in his short, *A Private Collection* (*Une collection particulière*, 1973). Borowczyk was reluctant to name specific artistic influences, but clearly he felt an affinity to Max Ernst, who in turn was a great admirer of *Immoral Tales*. Borowczyk also befriended the Serbian artist Ljuba and

made a brilliant short showing him feverishly painting his vast, erotically themed canvases.

Artistic works would register in sometimes oblique, sometimes direct ways in Borowczyk's films. On a wall of the chateau in which *The Beast* is set can be seen a once scandalous Polish painting, Władysław Podkowiński's *Frenzy of Exultations*, in which a naked woman bestraddles a wild stallion. It serves effectively as a reminder that this 'original' story of bestiality in France has its origins even in late 19th-century Poland. In his very idiosyncratic version of Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne* (*Docteur Jekyll et les femmes*, 1980), Borowczyk contrives to have a 'lost' Vermeer painting presented as an engagement present. Its spirit of quiet domesticity sits in stark contrast to the orgiastic frenzy that is about to be unleashed, though at the same time the Dutch master's use of directional light is part of the film's overall aesthetic design.

Borowczyk had a remarkable flair for composition and conjuring period details, whatever the century (he was happier out of his own time). But he was also a great master of combining music with image, on a par with, say, Stanley Kubrick. A movement from a Handel organ concerto in *Gota, Isle of Love*, in which the solemn tread of the bass is counterpointed by the ecstatic solo soaring above, serves as a perfect expression of desire over rigidity. The medieval music in *Blanche* and *Immoral Tales*, the jangling Scarlatti in *The Beast*, even the 70s juke-box hits of *La Marge* are all inseparable from the visual texture of these films. And Borowczyk also worked brilliantly with the electronic composer Bernard Parmegiani, whose Dionysiac sounds accompany Dr Jekyll to his poisoned demise with unforgettable intensity.

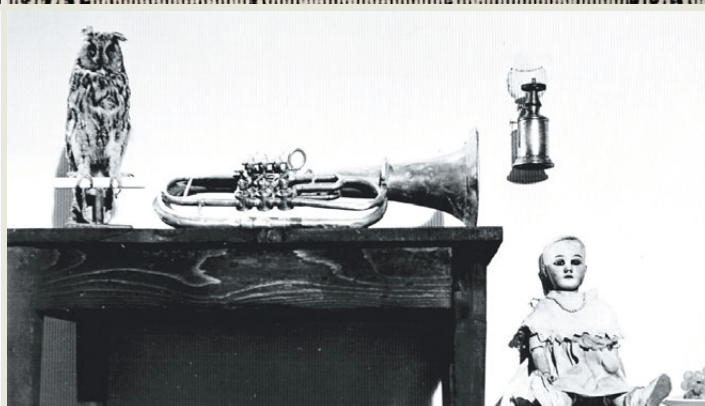
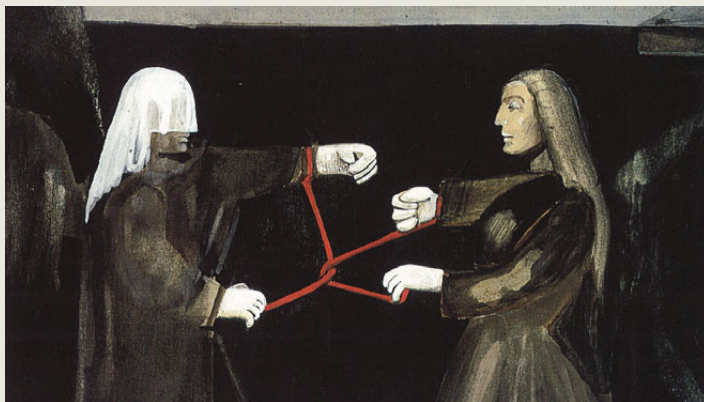
SINGULAR VISIONS
(Clockwise from right),
Borowczyk (far right)
with Max Ernst (centre);
A Private Collection (1973);
and Borowczyk's poster
designs for *The Affair Blum*
(1948) and *Judgement of*
God (1952)



POSTERS COURTESY FILMOTEKA NARODOWA; LIGA BOROWCZYK

THE ANIMATOR

'Cinema is animated photographs'



FLIGHTS OF FANCY
(Clockwise from bottom left) *Theatre of Mr and Mrs Kabal* (1967), *Once Upon a Time...* (1957), *Angels' Games* (1964), *Grandma's Encyclopedia* (1963) and *Renaissance* (1963)

Even before beginning his official training as an artist, Borowczyk began making very short films, including one tantalisingly listed as a visit to Fernand Léger's studio. These amateur efforts were created for personal viewing and have proved impossible to see since. But it was the collaboration with fellow graphic artist Jan Lenica that led to him being discovered outside Poland.

Borowczyk and Lenica met as artists who at first felt excluded from the world of cinema, which was dominated by those who had trained at the new film schools. But this worked to their benefit, as it was a time of comparative liberalisation and the boss of their unit – the director Jerzy Kawalerowicz – left them alone to realise their own dreams. According to Lenica, their first collaboration, *Once Upon a Time...* (AKA *Once There Was*, 1957), was made without a script but through sheer invention, using any materials to hand – old photographs, newspaper clippings, children's picture books and everyday kitsch. They called the result “an animated joke”, and it won a Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

When their subsequent collaboration, *House* (*Dom*, 1958), won the Grand Prix at the World Exhibition in Brussels in 1958, it was clear animation had taken a great leap forward. Objects were transformed by

movement into living entities – a human wig became a rapacious animal, a woman caressing a mannequin head caused it to fall apart. Film historian Parker Tyler wrote that “the whole history of avant-garde film can be traced [in *House*]”.

Although Lenica and Borowczyk were to meet again in Paris, they did not collaborate further. As Lenica said, “You cannot have dreams in a crowd. Even two can be a crowd sometimes.” Borowczyk was a single-minded creator and this would be evident even when he moved into the world of feature films involving crews and actors. Everyone had to be willing to do his bidding, and he demanded complete control over whatever was presented within the film frame.

In France, Borowczyk would make his masterpieces of animation: *Renaissance* (1963), in which objects scattered by a grenade blast reassemble themselves; and *Angels' Games*, a stark evocation of the concentration camps created through vivid gouaches. In just a few minutes Borowczyk evokes entire worlds in which creation and destruction, terror and beauty coexist in a spiral of time. He devised drawn characters and developed their lives into a feature-length ‘cartoon for adults’ with *Theatre of Mr and Mrs Kabal* (1967). Moving on from these bizarre, absurd figures to using real actors in real decors was not such a giant leap.



THE EXILE

'I wasn't at all an exile. I came to France because I was engaged by producers there. I could have chosen other countries but I chose France'

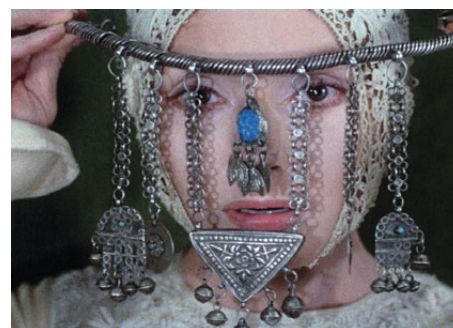
By the time Borowczyk began his studies as an artist, he was in a communist state. He once half-joked to me that at school they were taught that all films were made by Lenin. But if he had strong feelings for or against communism, he rarely expressed them, preferring to remain apolitical. His departure from Poland to France in 1958 came about through his various awards and the fresh opportunities to work there. Initially he came under the sponsorship of Polish-born producer Anatole Dauman, who had had notable early successes with Alain Resnais, such as *Night and Fog* (1955) and *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), and later would produce films by Bresson, Godard, Wenders, Schlöndorff and Oshima. Borowczyk's first film made in France, *Les Astronautes* (*The Astronauts*, 1959), was co-signed by none other than Chris Marker. Marker later admitted that his name was there simply to help with the production, and his sole contribution was suggesting his favourite bird, the owl, as a companion to the space traveller. In return he cast Borowczyk's wife, Ligia Branice, in *La Jetée* (1962). Borowczyk himself celebrated her haunting beauty in several films, notably the tragic short *Rosalie* (1966), *Goto, Isle of Love* and *Blanche*.

Goto is set on a mythical island ruled by the imperious Goto III (Pierre Brasseur), where schoolchildren are taught to adore their leader and order is maintained through fear and punishment. Is it against military

dictatorship, or is Borowczyk reflecting on the Stalinist legacy of his own youth? The director himself was proud of the fact it was banned both in Franco's Spain and in the Soviet-dominated countries. In fact, he deliberately filmed in black and white (with some brief shots in colour) so as not to identify the military uniforms with any particular regime.

The medieval saga *Blanche* was based on a Polish epic poem, but could it have been made in his home country? Though Borowczyk's films were really only appreciated in Poland by a few *cognoscenti*, several requests were made for his return. His attitude was simple: of course he would, but only if he had total freedom of expression. That was granted so he could make a film of a once controversial Polish novel by Stefan Zeromski, *The Story of Sin* (1975). A great success at the time, and still highly regarded, this film was made during a brief window of liberalisation, and the offer was not to be repeated.

Later in life Borowczyk would despair that the rise to power of Catholicism in Poland following the fall of communism had simply replaced the old climate of oppression. The anti-clericalism Borowczyk so often expressed in his films – the Borgia family's orgy in a church in *Immoral Tales*, the pederast priest in *The Beast*, the sexually rampant nuns in *Behind Convent Walls* (1977) – was not going to win him any favour with the authorities in his newly pious homeland.



HARD-HITTING WORKS
(Clockwise from left)
Borowczyk's *Goto, Isle of Love* (1969) and *Blanche* (1971) were celebrated for their visual poetry; the short *Les Astronautes* (1959)



THE VOYEUR

'I am a voyeur in the sense that everybody is. Curiosity is the most precious aspect of human nature'

LIVE FLESH

In *Immoral Tales* (1974), which Borowczyk declared was 'a manifesto about the indecency of censorship', he chose to foreground the erotic obsessions latent in his early work

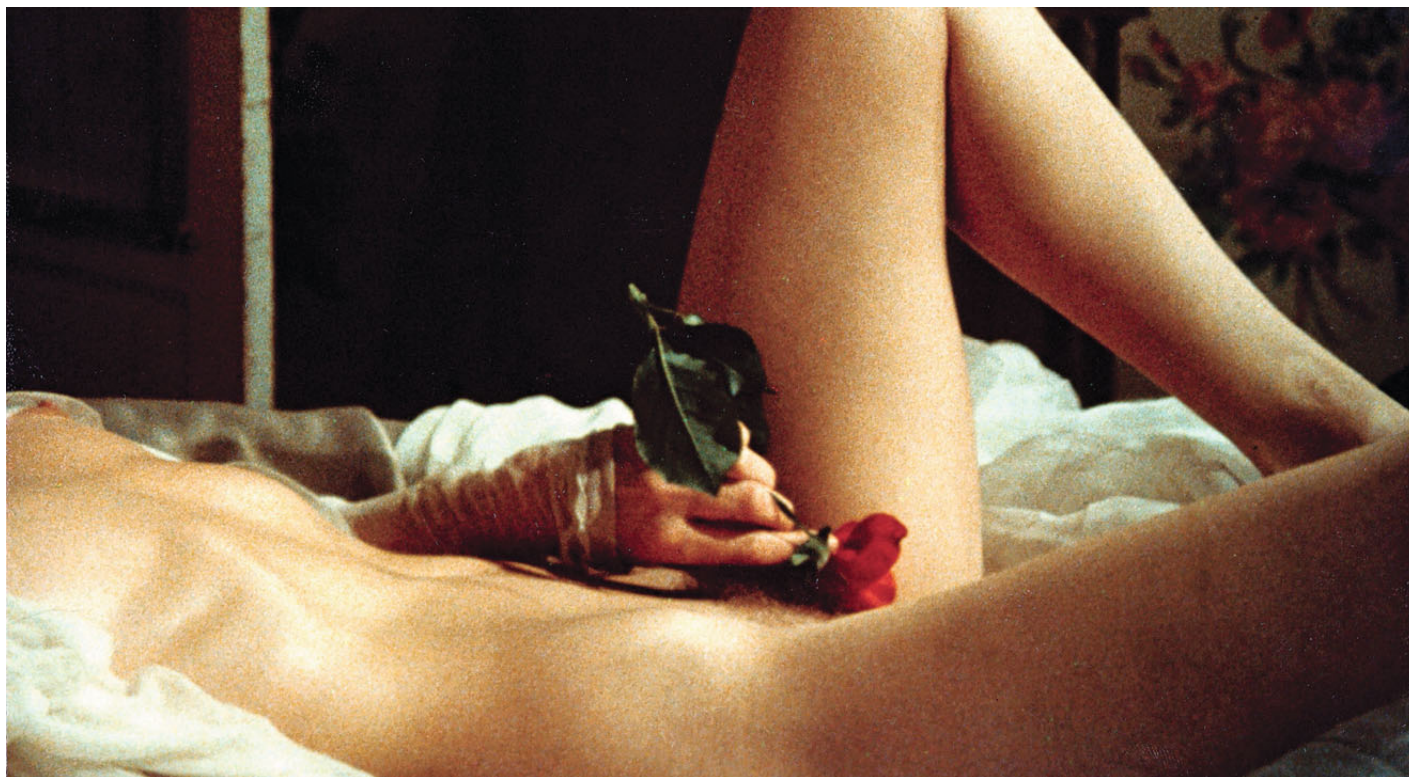
Borowczyk has frequently been described as a stylist, but defining that style is not so simple. For one thing, the look of his films changed with camera and film technology. His first two features, *Goto*, *Isle of Love* and *Blanche*, are largely composed with strong, rigid frames. In *Goto*, confinement and secrecy are expressed through stark, cell-like rooms connected by grills and trapdoors. The action of *Blanche* all takes place in or around a medieval castle, and it's mostly composed in images that are extremely frontal and flat, like an animated tapestry.

But by the time Borowczyk made *La Marge*, shot in a variety of locations in contemporary Paris, the exigencies of filming suggested a looser and more fluid approach to framing. His regular operator, Noël Véry, has often talked of Borowczyk's impatience on set. Realising that time was being eaten up by his demands on fixing decor and the movements of actors, he would suddenly demand they begin filming straightaway. Discovering that Véry was extremely adept at handheld shots (he would go on to become France's leading Steadicam operator), Borowczyk decided that just about every scene should be filmed this way, and it became his *modus operandi* for the rest of his career.

This slightly tremulous method, in which the perceptible instability of the image makes the spectator particularly conscious of a point of view, reinforced the sense of looking in a Borowczyk film. On occasion this is made clear in swift pans that emulate eye movement, particularly when characters regard objects such as paintings, photographs and texts before them. There are frequent scenes in which observation is key to discovery and understanding. In *Goto* the possession of a precious pair of binoculars is central to the autocratic ruler being made aware of his wife's infidelity. In *La Marge*, the central character acquires a telescope. Everyone is spying all the time. In the 'Erzsébet Báthory' episode in *Immoral Tales*, the infamous countess/vampire collects young women and in her castle has them herded into cubicles to shower under the watchful eye of her male page. But what initially is presented as a pleasurable activity is in fact a ritual in which they are prepared for death to ensure her immortality. Furthermore, the page who spies on them is revealed to be the countess's female lover. Borowczyk enjoys playing such games of complicity and surprise with the audience, so that we condemn his 'voyeurism' at our peril.

THE PORNOGRAPHER

'Pornography is in the eye of the beholder'



When Borowczyk made *Immoral Tales*, he announced it as “a manifesto about the indecency of censorship”. By dealing in each of the four episodes with a story from a different century, he sought to illustrate specific taboos that have existed throughout history – fellatio, masturbation, homosexuality, incest. But in tackling such themes, which had previously been implicit in his films, Borowczyk entered into a realm of the senses that would define his future career.

The year 1975 was a significant one for the erotic film in France. The recently elected president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, had just abolished state censorship and cinemas throughout the country devoted more and more of their screens to explicit ‘sex films’. Within a year, the huge success of the relatively softcore *Emmanuelle* (1974) had opened the gates to a film such as *Exhibition* (1975), which showed in full detail the shooting of real sex scenes. Producer Anatole Dauman capitalised on this open season by announcing that artistic erotic fare would now have its place. He encouraged Borowczyk to take an episode intended but considered too risqué for *Immoral Tales* and expand it into a feature. This short film, set in the 18th century, depicted an aristocratic young lady who is raped in a forest by a bear-like beast, only for her to take the sexual upper hand and ravish the

monster to death. Borowczyk used it in his feature *The Beast* as the recurring dream of an American heiress who has been lined up for marriage to a French noble who carries the genetic traits of this distant act of bestiality. For all the close-ups of female genitalia, along with the beast’s huge fake erection and plentiful emissions, Borowczyk was not truly indulging in the human hardcore imagery of his contemporaries. Rather it’s an outrageous challenge to the audience, questioning how far a fantasy of this order is acceptable to their tastes and moral attitude.

Borowczyk would say that he never had any inclination to emulate or compete with the worlds of *Deep Throat* (1972) or the French pornocrats. He wished primarily to be at liberty to express his desires – a freedom he had most of all as an animator – and was not concerned with satisfying the lusts of a largely male audience. In fact, in his films sexual ecstasy is achieved by far more women than men. He constantly denied he made ‘erotic cinema’, even once declaring, “I think a Disney film is more pornographic.” He personally saw *The Beast* as a comedy. But there’s obviously no

PLEASURE GARDEN
Borowczyk constantly denied he made ‘erotic cinema’, and personally regarded *The Beast* (above) as a comedy

question that producers felt differently and wanted to market Borowczyk as a high-class eroticist. He had to bend to some of their demands, such as adding a brief shot of a dildo in action in *Behind Convent Walls*, and was obliged to stay mute when inserts depicting bestiality from another film entirely were added to *The Art of Love* (1983). And there is, of course, the sad fact of *Emmanuelle 5* (1987) appearing on his résumé. Borowczyk himself said the money was raised on his name, and when he could not work with the star (*Penthouse* Pet Monique Gabrielle) he left the direction to his assistant, claiming responsibility only for the short film-within-a-film. His final efforts for the European TV collection *Série Rose*, four short films adapted from distinguished literary sources, were artfully made but extremely lightweight.

In the context of today’s world of instant internet hardcore, and of the now common practice of European auteurs such as Lars von Trier, Catherine Breillat and Alain Guiraudie of including scenes of real sex in their films, Borowczyk’s imagery might seem to some at best playful, even coy. His subject may be human sexuality but his real interest was in games, humour and provocation. Defining eroticism as “simply love without the aim of procreation”, he would insist that “art has the right to engage itself with the most secret realms of our thoughts... that’s its privilege.”



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PUNK'S NOT DEAD

After more than a decade of dark, difficult work from Lukas Moodysson, the director has returned to the observant, upbeat charm of his earliest films with *'We Are the Best!'*, a tale of a trio of young female misfits in Sweden in the early 1980s who decide to form a band

By Ashley Clark



Near the start of Lukas Moodysson's seventh feature as writer-director, *We Are the Best!*, a pair of disgruntled punks – shy 13-year-old Bobo (Mira Barkhammar) and outspoken 12-year-old Klara (Mira Grosin) – lope around a dusty school gym in a parody of a jog. We're in suburban Stockholm, the year is 1982, and the two best friends have just about had it with the banality that surrounds them: clueless (if ultimately loving) parents; air-headed classmates who say things like, "Punk is dead. Didn't you know that?"; pain-in-the-arse teachers, and all the rest. Mid-trot, they begin to improvise a song that starts innocuously enough but swiftly becomes a hilariously trenchant diagnosis of the world's ills as refracted

YOUTH IN REVOLT
We Are the Best! features winningly naturalistic performances from its inexperienced actors (top, from left) Liv LeMoyne, Mira Barkhammar and Mira Grosin as the young punks

through their hatred of sport ("The world is a morgue, but you're watching Björn Borg"). In a flash of inspiration borne of frustration, our spirited young rebels finally have a mission, even if they have slightly missed the boat on punk's glory days: they will form a band. It doesn't matter that they can't play a note because they have a plan: to press-gang their serenely friendless Christian classmate Hedvig (Liv LeMoyne) – who can actually play the guitar – into joining their group.

Unlike other examples of the teen-girl-punk subgenre (Allan Moyle's *Times Square* from 1980 and Lou Adler's *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains* from 1982 spring to mind), *We Are the Best!* is largely uninterested in plot. It's far more concerned with character and lovingly crafted period detail. In a more traditional film, the scene where the girls decide to enter the running for the school concert would spark the plot into action and mark a clear end-point for the narrative. Not here; the girls turn up too late and it's swiftly forgotten about. *We Are the Best!* unfolds in accordance with the arrhythmic inconsistency of its protagonists' psyches. In this respect it recalls Moodysson's 1998 debut *Show Me Love* (AKA *Fucking Amål*) a tender tale of love developing between two teenage girls that Ingmar Bergman hailed as "a young master's first masterpiece". Scenes frequently begin in a tenor of earnest seriousness, but dissolve in fits of giggles. Boys – and the attendant emotional destabilisation they bring – briefly enter the picture but are no more than a passing concern. The film is anchored by winningly naturalistic performances from the young, inexperienced actors – Barkhammar had previously acted in amateur theatre, Grosin in one short film, and LeMoyne only in school plays. They're all evidently keyed in to the film's charmingly ramshackle, DIY ethos, and the absolute blast they seem to be having translates readily to the screen.

Unlike *We Are the Best!*'s mini-revolutionaries, Moodysson is no autodidact – he studied at Stockholm's Dramatiska Institutet, the country's only film school. But each of his films has been shot through with a ragged energy and an interest in the outcasts of this world. Think back to the oddball girls from *Show Me Love*; the hapless, squabbling mid-70s commune of *Together* (2000); the tragic protagonist of harrowing sex-trafficking drama *Lilya 4-Ever* (2002); or the gaggle of amateur pornographers at the epicentre of claustrophobic horror show *A Hole in My Heart* (2004).

Moodysson too has always had a rebel's reputation. Long branded a notoriously difficult interview subject



(though I can find no trace of that when we meet in a central London hotel), he rose to fame in Sweden with his precocious teenage poetry, and hailed his quadruple win for *Show Me Love* at the 1999 Guldbagge Awards in Sweden by railing against the industry in his speech and giving the audience the finger.

Moodysson is now 45, but retains a youthful air despite the salt and pepper in his beard. He cuts a slight, wiry figure and, clad in black jeans, hoody and beanie, has an appropriately punkish, vaguely piratical air (his 'look' resembles a cross between *Searching for the Young Soul Rebels*-era Dexys Midnight Runners and Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*).

He speaks in deliberate, measured sentences, often punctuated by oceanic pauses, but soon gets going when discussing the film's aims: "On one level the film is actually about making art. Art as a tool of survival or dealing with things, of handling reality. If you experience something, you turn it into a song. 'Sing Your Life', as Morrissey once put it."

But what does the hotly contested term 'punk' actually mean to him? "That term is not really something that I thought very much about. I'm more interested in the specifics. When I made this film I thought lots about what it was like to be a 13-year-old in those days when punk was dying but still a little bit alive. It



was a time where you could do something, and it didn't have to be very good. And I still have that engine inside of me. On a daily basis I doubt myself if I'm doing good things or bad things. But I never doubt that I should make them."

There are certainly autobiographical elements to the film (Moodysson would have been the same age as the girls in 1982 and claims to have shared their taste in music), but it is based on the graphic novel *Never Goodnight*, written by his wife Coco. He has worked with her on a number of his films, but *We Are the Best!* was not in the main a collaborative experience: "When I decided to write the script based on her book I just needed to be free from her in a way. It could be inspired by my wife, but it couldn't be about her because it felt too incestuous." Yet they did dovetail when it came to getting the details right: "I would talk to my wife about things like casting, costume and set design. I'd call her in a panic and say, 'I don't know what kind of trousers Bobo should wear,' and she would say, 'She should wear those kind of trousers.'"

We Are the Best! unites two core tenets that helped to define Moodysson's early work – his aforementioned ability to keenly capture the excruciating, moment-to-moment oscillations of absolute surety and crippling insecurity in teenage life; and how popular music can be used as a tool to connect the psychological states of characters. Think back to the disarmingly earnest moment in *Show Me Love* when the girls hitch a ride with a random stranger and get lost in each other's eyes while Foreigner's 'I Want to Know What Love Is' blares on the car stereo; the repeated use of Abba's plaintive 'SOS' in *Together*; or, controversially, the use of the vicious 'Mein Herz brennt' by German heavy metallers Rammstein to illustrate the white noise between the ears of *Lilya 4-Ever*'s suicidal title character.

In *We Are the Best!*, music is treated as an essential form of self-expression but is also fertile ground for discussing a variety of issues, including spirituality. Moodysson is a committed Christian and includes a number of scenes – alternately hilarious and touching – in which the girls wrestle with issues of faith. Young Klara has a near-messianic commitment to atheism, and declares of Hedvig: "We'll influence her away from God... That's what punk's all about – influencing other people." For an ostensibly light film, it's weighty stuff.

We Are the Best! is Moodysson's first film since 2009's *Mammoth*. During that film's post-production, his father died – an event that, unsurprisingly, had a huge impact. In 2010, he told an interviewer he'd considered giving up filmmaking entirely: "Sometimes I wake up and it feels like it's over." He briefly considered making a film about the experience but instead wrote a novel, *Döden & Co.* (literally 'Death & co'), which was broadly well received in his native Sweden. What then has influenced the embrace of positivity apparent in *We Are the Best!*? Moodysson's reply has a perverse kind of logic: "Sometimes it feels like if I'm happy, that equals dark movies. I'm not saying that I felt bad when I made this movie but I needed to make a movie that would be uplifting because I needed to be uplifted. And I felt that people around me needed that. I wanted to make a happy movie, the kind of movie you want to see if you are feeling bad."

We Are the Best! is not without hints of melancholy

Life is sometimes really painful and if you portray life it's OK to make painful movies. But never make cold movies because that's not life

REBEL REBEL
Lukas Moodysson (below) has a keen instinct for portraying the vagaries of teenage emotions, but while there are autobiographical elements to *We Are the Best!*, it was actually based on the graphic novel *Never Goodnight* by his wife, Coco

(the thoughtful, introverted Bobo undergoes a grueling period of self-loathing), but it's unarguably his most upbeat and purely enjoyable work in more than a decade. *Mammoth* was a gloomy, multi-continent saga concerned with the corrosive effects of unfettered capitalism, and constituted Moodysson's contribution to a subgenre of films – the liberal humanist, we-are-all-connected bad trip (see also: *Crash*, *Babel*, *21 Grams*, 360) – that now seems all but played out. Before that came the monochrome curveball *Container* (2006), an avant-garde, plot-free stream of consciousness; and the jarring *A Hole in My Heart*, whose combination of low-grade visuals, deliberately aimless narrative and shock tactics (including gruesome close-ups of genital plastic surgery) alienated audiences and critics alike: it's the one occasion when Moodysson's evident empathy for the vicissitudes of adolescent life transmogrified into adolescent, 'fuck you' filmmaking. The despairing *Lilya 4-Ever* completes a spell of darkness that stretches back a long time.

I suggest that if anything connects the director's disparate string of films, it's a palpable strain of humanism: even his scummiest characters seem to have beating hearts. Moodysson, by his deadpan standards, seems enthused by the idea: "That's the way I want it to be. That's what I always try to say when people claim that I'm making these dark, experimental movies. They are combined by some kind of warmth. I always like the characters and I always want the best thing for them. I feel like I'm protecting them." Moodysson becomes animated. "I don't like movies that are cold, regardless of how good they are. Cold for me is like death. It's like suicide. It's like, why live if you feel like life is cold? Life is sometimes really painful and if you portray life it's OK to make painful movies, it's OK to make dark movies. But never make cold movies because that's not life."

A key factor behind Moodysson's ability to flip through this Rolodex of contrasting moods and styles, all the while maintaining complete creative control, has been the unstinting support of production company Memphis Films, and in particular its owner, Lars Jönsson. Jönsson met Moodysson at film school and has produced all of his films. "We're both really stubborn: if we want to do something, we'll normally do it – it's not necessarily good, but we do it", says Moodysson, who suggests that such support is particularly rare in the Swedish film industry. "It's been a good process and we've been very faithful to each other; he's been very faithful to me, even if it's on projects that are not really his cup of tea – like *Container*."

I ask Moodysson about his future plans and a glint comes into his eye: "In Sweden there is a tradition that you go and pick a lot of mushrooms, and then you go home and you check out what they are. Some of them are poisonous. It's a bit like that. You don't know. Sometimes you don't find anything and sometimes you find a lot. You just have to trust the process."

If the next mushroom does turn out to be poisonous and Moodysson returns to the muddled psychological spaces of *A Hole in My Heart* or *Mammoth*, we'll always have the vibrant (if not necessarily always tuneful) *We Are the Best!* to lift our spirits. 

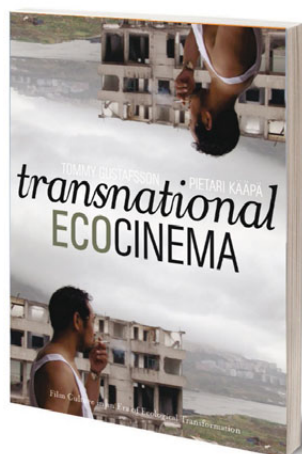
 ***We Are the Best!* is released in the UK on 18 April and is reviewed on page 90**



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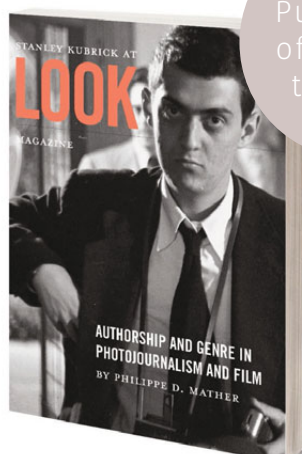
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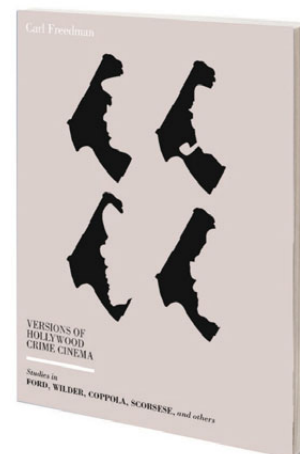
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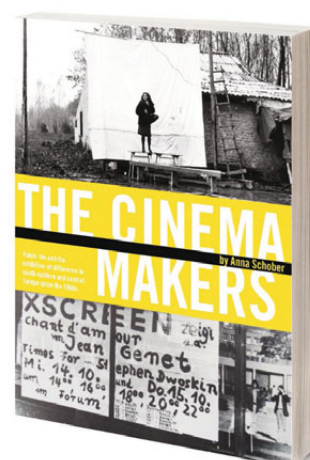
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JEREMY THOMAS

PART 2 THE MAKING OF A SUPER-PRODUCER

In the concluding part of our career overview, the veteran producer outlines his rapidly developing profile following his return from Australia where his feature debut, *Mad Dog Morgan*, was shot in 1975. He discusses his longstanding creative relationships with Nicolas Roeg, Bernardo Bertolucci and David Cronenberg, laments the passing of a wild era of maverick filmmaking led by 'extremists' such as Sam Peckinpah, and explains why he has had to 'mutate or die' in order to continue working successfully in an increasingly conformist modern industry. **Interview by Nick James**

Nick James: So how did things commence after *Mad Dog Morgan*?

Jeremy Thomas: When I came back to London, I got hold of a script by Michael Austin called *The Shout* [1978], based on a Robert Graves short story about a man who could kill with a shout. I had recently seen *Deep End*, so I gave [its director Jerzy] Skolimowski the script. He was in a down period, having made a couple of turkeys. He said, "I want to shoot cricket, because it's such a crazy game." He had no idea what the rules were, he was interested in the bails and the stumps and the symbolism of the game. At the time he was a name to be reckoned with so I managed to get an incredible cast: Alan Bates, Susannah York, John Hurt, Robert Stephens, Tim Curry and Jim Broadbent. I wanted a line producer and met Joyce Herlihy. She had been an army captain in the signals corps with a machine gun at the fall of Singapore and a production secretary on big Hollywood movies in Africa and in Europe. On the set at Hartland Point in Devon, where the cricket match was shot, there were ten very primitive caravans. I asked Joyce about it and she said, "Don't worry about the actors, they always moan in the mornings." That was the sort of wisdom I got from her. The film won the Grand Prix du Jury at Cannes and got sold all over the world.

Before going to Skolimowski, I'd offered *The Shout* to Nicolas Roeg. I'd visited the set of *Performance* [1970] as a boy – the hippest place to go in Notting Hill. And then I saw the film. Wow. And *Walkabout* [1970] was beyond belief. Nic was preparing *Flash Gordon* at Pinewood [a project that passed to Mike Hodges]. I went in and told him, "I'll do anything to make a film with you." He said, "You see this script here? It's owned by Carlo

Ponti. If you can get the rights, I'll do it." It was called *Illusions* but it became *Bad Timing* [1980]. There was a screenplay by Yale Udoff which Nic liked very much. It sounds unbelievable that a young lad would get something from Carlo Ponti, but I got it. Then Anthony Williams, head of production at Rank, said, "We'll put up 50 per cent if you find the other 50 per cent". Sandy Lieberman had just been made president of worldwide production [at Twentieth Century-Fox]. He said, "OK, I'll give you the other half." So we made *Bad Timing*, a very sophisticated film, a baptism of fire in terms of the emotion Nic puts in. But the opening was like a wet fish. We were so moved by this wonderful work but when it opened it was excoriated. The [Rank] gong man was taken off. The board saw the film and said, "We can't be involved with a film like that." And it was met with the full dose of group feeding-frenzy hysteria from the press.



Two of a kind: Thomas (left) with Nicolas Roeg

NJ: Did this baptism of fire make you feel more like a producer?

JT: I was beginning to understand. With *Mad Dog* I'd been f***ed badly on the business. Then I got in to Cannes and having won the Grand Prix, having breathed that high-altitude air, I wanted it. I've been true to that ever since. Straight after *Bad Timing* we went into *Eureka* [1983], my first and only experience of a full Hollywood studio film. It was made under the David Begelman regime. I was a sort of neophyte dealing with a \$30 million movie – a fortune then – with Gene Hackman, Rutger Hauer, Theresa Russell and Mickey Rourke. I was encouraging of a certain wild behaviour because I admired it. I admired Sam Peckinpah and that extremism that went in to films in those days. It doesn't exist now. When I first started making films, if you didn't supply a cold beer at wrap, people would be very, very grumpy and maybe resign. Today if you offer somebody a beer at wrap, you're taken to jail or sued. You're not allowed an alcoholic drink on the set, you're not even allowed to smoke. If you're drunk, you're fired. It's in your contract. You're putting the film into disrepute.

NJ: In a way you're saying the Hays Code belatedly won.

JT: Yes. I'm not condoning drunkenness, I'm just saying that that part of the creative process is no longer there. Film is a very unusual combination of things because it has an incredible financial commitment of spending, yet it has to be free and creative. To be any good, the cinema that I do has to be free and yet there are many constraints on it now and my best films were made in an era of wildness, not least financial wildness. If you look at my films from the 70s through to the 90s, they were just me:



➔ producer Jeremy Thomas. Now I've got 13 executive producers all with a voice. To make these films you have to bring together many, many sources of money, all of whom want a strong voice. I've had to mutate or die.

NJ: So how did you come out of *Eureka*?

JT: I made a \$300,000 Hollywood producer's fee, a lot of money then, and I pumped it into my business. A film producer who has no money is an oxymoron because it's very hard to be one unless you can flash the cash. You've got to buy the rights, take people out, schmooze, travel. If you have to go so cap in hand, you're asking, "Can I breathe today or not?" And that is not creative.

I'd sat next to Oshima at the [Cannes] prize-giving for *The Shout*. Five years later he sent me a project, *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* [1982]. I liked it very much. I had this partner, Terry Glinwood. I was introduced to him by [film financier] Sir John Terry. He wanted to work on *Merry Christmas*. I went round to his apartment and John called, and I said, "Where are we going to find some more money?" He said, "Let's go through Yellow Pages." So we got to 'H' and called up [merchant bank] Hill Samuel. John was put through to someone called Rodney Payne. We went to see Payne. He said, "We're not interested in film finance, but I'm going to introduce you to somebody who'll put up a lot of money," which he did. Cut: *The Last Emperor* [1987]. Payne took us to the chairman of Hill Samuel, who said to me – his name was Brian Quick – "Do you want a quick answer?" I said, "Yes please, Brian." He said, "If you can set me up a dinner with the head of the China International Trust and Investment Corporation I'll get you the money to make your film." Hill Samuel wanted to get into China. I'd already got some of the money because I had a distributor in France, a distributor in Italy and a distributor in Germany. I'd phone them up and say, I need 200,000 [pounds] development money from each of you guys towards *The Last Emperor*. Fine.

So, to flip back to *Merry Christmas*, we got Bowie and Kitano [Takeshi] and Ryuichi Sakamoto together with Tom Conti, Jack Thompson and the great designers and cameramen, and shot in Rarotonga [in Polynesia]. It came to Cannes and was a gigantic hit.

NJ: How did that change things for you?

JT: I had a golden period where I owned my movies and I could sell them for more than they cost. The directors and myself would share the film and they loved it. Suddenly I was mastering what was mastering me. I read a screenplay and I look at the things the filmmaker wants to do – take [the forthcoming] *High Rise*, for instance: I'm thinking about the three films Ben Wheatley's made, Ben as a person, J.G. Ballard and *High Rise*. I'm using my mixology to say, "That's going to work." That's what I was doing with the Jarmusch film [*Only Lovers Left Alive*]. When Jim talked about the film, I saw what it could be. The question is how I can challenge hugely commercial romcoms and special-effects films with a film that I'm gonna feel good about myself, that can be commercial, that can interest other distributors and the public, and can satisfy critics and writers about films.

NJ: How did you get to mount *The Last Emperor* [1987]?

JT: I got a call from Bertolucci. He said, "I saw *Merry Christmas* and I was impressed. Do you want to meet up?" I said, "Why don't we meet at Lee Ho Fook?" Bernardo said, "It's strange you should choose a Chinese restaurant because I wanted to talk to you about *From Emperor to Citizen: The Autobiography of Aisin-Gioro Pu Yi*."

So Bertolucci is sitting in front of me but I wasn't looking at the Bertolucci of, say, *La Luna* [1979]. I was thinking, this is the monument that made 1900 [1976], *Last Tango in Paris* [1972], *The Conformist* [1970] and *Before the Revolution* [1964]. That was [the beginning of] a three-and-a-half-year journey to the Oscars in 1988, with all the difficulties involved of shooting [one of] the first [Western] features in China and of shipping all those people and food and costumes, the co-productions with different countries and all the political difficulties. I'd be frightened to consider a film like that today.

NJ: What about the smaller films of the early 1980s?

JT: Margaret Matheson at Central TV approached me and said, "Stephen Frears wants to make this subject written by Peter Prince [*The Hit*, 1984]." I also had *Insignificance* [1985], so we did a two-picture deal – there was a special tax regime for financing independent films and I managed to pull off two very good low-budget films, both of which went to Cannes.

By this time [Cannes Film Festival head] Gilles Jacob had become very important for me. Gilles took a liking to what I was trying to do and I got a lot of good breaks. I got many films into Cannes because I became a supplier, supplying the likes of Oshima.

In the past, films like *Apocalypse Now* [1979]

The way of making films was different then. Health and safety didn't exist. You don't make films under canvas in danger anymore

or *The Go-between* [1971] or *sex, lies and videotape* [1989] could win the Palme d'Or. It's changed. The juries have become more radical. That's not very good for festivals because now, if you win the Palme d'Or, it doesn't really mean as much. I enjoy having a good relationship with festival directors. Most people go to LA to see top executives. I don't. I worked that out a long time ago. It's a waste of time.

NJ: So who do you see in Hollywood?

JT: Friends. Actors. Directors. People from the past. I don't want to wait in somebody's outer office for an hour to have a meaningless meeting. It's demeaning. They're not interested in you or your culture. My friends and close colleagues in England who are successful ridicule me. But I'm not thinking whether I get this into 5,000 screens. My solidity is based on a longevity because we've been here in this building of film people making films since the early 1970s.

NJ: *The Last Emperor* seems to have been such a game-changer for you.

JT: Yes, but you forget the days of anguish and stomach-churning difficulties. It was semi-poorly received by Columbia Pictures, but nominated for nine Oscars. We did a clean sweep and I had numerous incredible offers from Hollywood but I just stuck my two fingers up in the air and went to stay in Jamaica for three months with Chris Blackwell. Then we made Arthur Miller's *Everybody Wins* [1990, directed by Karel Reisz] in Dino de Laurentiis's studios in Wilmington. I was sort of suckered into that project. It's not a well-known film but it looks much better today than it did when it came out. Luckily I was still working with Bertolucci on *The Sheltering Sky* [1990], which somehow I managed to get involved with.

NJ: It wasn't your project to begin with then?

JT: No. I had met David Cronenberg in Toronto and we got on like a house on fire. We were in a bar having a Red Stripe, and I said, "Why don't we do *Naked Lunch*?" I told him he was the only person in the world who could make it. So I went to Burroughs and got the rights for



About a boy: *The Last Emperor* (1987)



On the set of *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1982)



Crash (1996)



The Sheltering Sky (1990)

1,500 bucks a year over five or six years. I went to Tangier with Burroughs and David for ten days and we visited Paul Bowles and saw all the places and got stuck there because of storms.

Burroughs hadn't been back since he wrote *Naked Lunch*. Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* was a book Nic Roeg had wanted badly to make but I couldn't get the rights. It was owned by Warner Bros with Robert and Bill Aldrich. Robert Aldrich died before he got to make the film. Bernardo's agent, Jeff Berg, was approached by Warners and we got to do it. I got the world rights, they took the US. That was a much-anticipated film made in the same road where Bowles wrote it. We went through Morocco and Algeria, we crossed the Sahara and through Niger and made the film for real; built a fort in the sand dunes, spent \$28 million. It was a moment of megalomania that turned in to a well-received film. I like it very much today but it didn't have the magic of *The Last Emperor*.

Then I was in Cannes with Bernardo and he was wanting to make a film about Buddha. We got a call from [French businessman and producer] Francis Bouygues's office. So Bernardo came and seduced Mr Bouygues, who was sitting in a room in the Cap d'Antibes with a large statue of Buddha. One of his right-hand men asked how much we needed. "\$40 million." "Mr Bouygues will give you \$40 million". The quote from Bouygues was, "I want a garden that is cinema and the first plant I want is a film by Bernardo Bertolucci." That was *Little Buddha* [1993].

When making a film with Bernardo, the cultural experience is as important as the technique, because the technique is just there. The whole richness of a film is in the private pleasure, a hubbub of cultural mayhem going on for a short period that then explodes and you never see the people again. There were so many anecdotes from these films because of the size and the scale involved. Incredible, dangerous and life-threatening things. Health and safety didn't exist. The way of making films was completely different. You don't make films under canvas in danger, in floods and [with] plane drops anymore.

NJ: Tell me about *Naked Lunch* [1991]?

JT: It took David [Cronenberg] five or six years to write the script. It was an extremely difficult film to finance. Then Saddam Hussein started the [first] Gulf War, which meant that we couldn't shoot in Tangier. I rang David and said, "The film's collapsed." There was a bit of gnashing of teeth and weeping on the phone. Then he phoned me back in an hour and said, "I want to shoot it in Toronto and it's going to be better

and cheaper." We saved \$2 million on the cost and he did brilliant things like having a lot of people in a café on a corner in Toronto with two camels from the zoo going backwards and forwards. I still had my regular partners then who supported the film and a lot of Japanese support. It didn't perform well at the box office, although it's become some sort of classic.

Then there was the continuation of the relationship with Bernardo. *Stealing Beauty* [1995] had a screenplay by Susan Minot. We scored big time with the cast of Liv Tyler and Rachel Weisz. [*Stealing Beauty*] was financed by UGC and made in Tuscany on location. The film has an incredible patina. No matter who Bernardo is working with, the camera always becomes an amazing object which moves over everything in the scene in the right way. If you've seen another filmmaker try to make shots like that, you'll know it's a big deal. Bernardo's crew could lay down tracks in seconds, yet there was a gaiety around his shoots. Lunch was a very important part of the filmmaking experience. It was a great lesson in how to handle talent.

NJ: A Jeremy Thomas production should always be pleasurable.

JT: There's no point otherwise. This is why I have trouble with minimalist cinema. For me a film should have aspirations to be grand. What's going on is a privileged collaborative

creative moment between a group of people. Travelling and arriving are very different. The travelling part is always magnificent in the memory, the arriving just OK.

NJ: So when is the transitional moment?

JT: The delivery of the film. Every time you show your films to the public, there's a reality that you have to deal with. Like with *Bad Timing*. That was a film by adults for adults and the heart of it rang true to human relationships. Only someone like Nic was prepared to do a film like that, to go to the edge of what you can do.

NJ: Speaking of that, what do you think now about the reaction to *Crash* [1996]?

JT: When David said he wanted to make *Crash*, I knew it was going to be a rough ride culturally but I had no idea what was going to happen in the UK which was completely out of all proportion to what the film was – being banned in the West End and vilified by the press and my appearing as some sort of pervert to be promoting this film. We had a certificate. There was no problem with the BBFC. The film was made by adults for adults. It was suggestive and talked about forbidden sorts of acts. But it's just a brilliant creation. I love making films with Cronenberg. Long may it continue. I did turn down *Dead Ringers* [1988], which shows how crazy I can be.

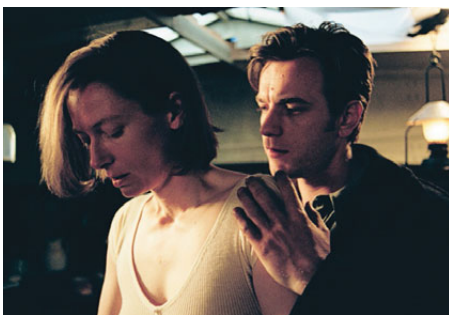
NJ: What about the film you directed [in 1998]?



Dangerous game: Art Garfunkel and Theresa Russell in Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing* (1980)



Sexy Beast (2000)



Young Adam (2002)



Thomas with Bertolucci on The Last Emperor set

JT: I read *All the Little Animals* by Walker Hamilton when I was in my twenties. I first imagined Dirk Bogarde as Mr Summers, the part that John Hurt plays in the film, and the young John Hurt as Bobby, the part that Christian Bale eventually played. I went to [Granada Television founder] Lord Bernstein, who had a handle on the book but Don Siegel had a second handle. The rights were very complicated, so I gave up. Cut. Lord Bernstein died and I thought, I must direct this film. So I optioned the book, my wife Eski wrote the screenplay and I found the money. I was overconfident though. The first day of shooting, the DP says, "Where do you want the camera?" I thought I had thought about it but I hadn't – I had to enact it. So with a wonderful continuity woman and a wonderful operator helping me, I got in the swing. After a few days it felt good, and the post-production was very enjoyable. When we finished I was bereft but I haven't made another.

NJ: Why not? Did it just not happen?

JT: I got a good two thumbs up in America, but it never made any money and I got very bruised by the personal nature of the reviews here. When I was in Cannes, where it played in *Un Certain Regard*, nobody showed me the London reviews. On the plane home I was sat next to this guy who looked very frightened. When we got to London, I asked somebody, "Who is that guy?" And they said, "He's the critic for the *Times*." The day before he'd written a review which said: "Better luck next time, if ever, Jeremy." That remained with me. I would like to direct again. It's probably a very indulgent thing for me to do and it also takes a lot of time. I've got a couple of other subjects I'm playing around with. But it's not for me to minimise how difficult it would be for me to get another film made.

NJ: Tell me about your more recent run of films?

JT: There are so many and I can't include them all. I met Kitano several times and he said, "I want to make a film in English and I want to make it with you." So we started *Brother* [2000] – Kitano in LA, high body count. It was a lot of fun hanging in downtown LA with these guys. The Japanese are very economical. Kitano even likes his mistakes. First set-up: LAX, taxi arrives with Kitano in LAX, he gets out of the car. It's been blocked [had its camera position determined]. Taxi arrives, misses the block, it's halfway out of frame, he gets out of the car on the edge of the frame. I asked Kitano about it. He said, "If it's something I hadn't thought about and I can accept it, I'll go forward." Oshima was the same. If he finished shooting a scene at 2.30pm, even with hundreds of people in the crowd,

he would wrap. Other directors would shoot hands and feet and faces till the end of the day.

I was shown Jonathan Glazer's video clips and commercials. By chance a screenplay, *Sexy Beast* [2000], part of a trilogy by David Scinto and Louis Mellis [along with *Gangster No. 1* and *44 Inch Chesl*], came through the door and Jonathan was attached. So I bought the script, they did some tweaking and the casting ended up different to what you'd imagine. You'd think Ben Kingsley would play the part Ray Winstone played and vice versa, but it worked out incredibly well. To me *The Long Good Friday* [1979], *Performance* and *Sexy Beast* are all films about the crime underworld in England. They're not 'gangster films'.

NJ: *Young Adam* [2002] was a different sort of film for you.

JT: But it wasn't though, because it was based on an Alex Trocchi story, and he fitted in to my love of beat literature. The story is very raw and it appealed to me. I didn't know Glasgow at all. I stayed in the hotel with the crew and the wonderful actors Tilda [Swinton] and Ewan

As my career went forward I became less needy to possess my films. I became sated. I decided I had to relax as a businessman

[McGregor]. Peter Mullan was there, Dave Mackenzie and all the good crew. You get to know the place. You move in with your posse. That's the best part of the film-making game.

Then we had *The Dreamers* [2003], a wonderful film, with Gilbert Adair drawing from his book *The Holy Innocents*. Bernardo loved it, but wanted some changes and Gilbert rewrote the script. It was a fantastic story about these three kids and so true to how life was then. It's got such a profoundness because Bernardo and Gilbert quote on cinema and the 60s in an incredible way. The film is one of the best I've been involved with.

NJ: But of course one gets older...

JT: Yes. As my career went forward I became less needy to possess the films. I became sated. I decided I had to relax as a businessman. When I tell this story, of my career, it all sounds so unreal. It's hard to think that such a life exists. There's an anecdote I like: a guy gets made head of production at a big studio and his best friend rings him up and says, "Can we have a meeting?" So the friend comes in for the meeting and says, "I've got this idea to make a film." And the head of production says, "But don't you understand, 75 per cent of films are complete failures?" And the friend says, "I just want to be part of that 75 per cent." ☺

i A season of Jeremy Thomas films runs until 29 April at BFI Southbank, London

John Hurt (centre) and Christian Bale (right) in Thomas's directorial debut *All the Little Animals* (1998)

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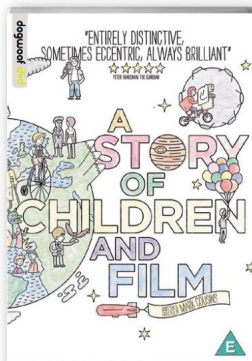
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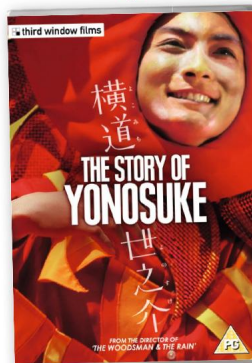


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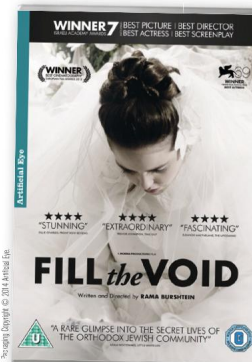
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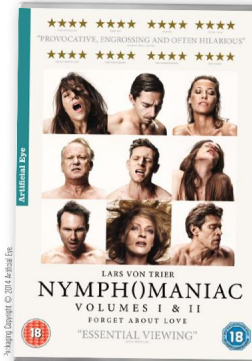


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ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE

AFTER THE CRASH

Straddling cinema and gallery, Hito Steyerl sifts ideas, images and objects from the detritus of contemporary capitalism

By Nina Power

Between the lifeless genres of a bloated Hollywood, the obscurity of contemporary art (at least the stuff that doesn't sell for millions) and the academic essay no one reads, lies a space of opportunity where cinema, and thought, can flourish. This ambiguous space where documentary film meets critical art meets philosophical essay has a few notable stars: Patrick Keiller, the Otolith Group, the Black Audio Film Collective, the late Chris Marker. But it is the work of Berlin-based contemporary filmmaker, artist and writer Hito Steyerl, whose recent films are currently on show at the ICA, that perhaps best exemplifies and reveals the possibilities of the film that is also art and also an essay without ever being reducible to a single category. These works are equally at home in a cinema or gallery, operating as installations or screenings, and are loved by artists as much as by philosophers.

Steyerl's film essays and texts are diverse yet strangely acute, like a magpie with a laser. She is obsessed with, among other things, the detritus of contemporary capitalism. In Steyerl's work, images and ideas have as much material reality as hard objects, a perfect insight for an age in which abstract financial speculation ultimately creates brutal practical deprivation. Her 2010 film *In Free Fall* examines the afterlife of a crashed Boeing plane, used as a stunt prop for action movies, as well as other examples of falling and crashing, particularly as it relates to the recent global economic crisis. Abandoned CDs, once regarded as indestructible data-storage units, are portrayed in the film as slightly sad, forgotten objects. All things must end, even the future. As Steyerl puts it in an accompanying essay, written for e-flux magazine: "[I]f there is no stable ground available for our social lives and philosophical aspirations, the consequence must be a permanent, or at least intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike. But why don't we notice?"

The idea of a 'crash' – whether the financial crash or the plane crashes that haunt capitalism's imagination – is explored with characteristic wit in the film, with Steyerl as a deadly serious air hostess at one point giving directions in

case of emergency. The emergency, of course, is already here. More recent work, such as *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), on show at the ICA, pursues the implications of the idea that we are living after the crash. Embracing internet-era modes – websites, portals, text-speak, gifs, aspirational YouTube self-help videos – Steyerl examines the lexicon of finance and its destabilising fluidity. What ground are we standing on? Will there be more crashes, like waves on a rapidly eroding beach?

Yet Steyerl's work is at the same time resolutely focused on the real life of objects and their curious persistence. In *November* (2004), she traces the story of Andrea Wolf, an old teenage friend who starred in Hito's first, unfinished action movie about a gang of girls who beat up men. Wolf was killed as a militant in the Kurdish struggle for independence in 1998 and Steyerl eloquently and movingly traces the extraordinary history

Steyerl's interest in politics and art is motivated by an enduring love for the lost objects and overlooked ideas of earlier times



Magpie with a laser: Hito Steyerl in *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*

ALL IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST

of her life and death via a series of reflections on the ethics of martial arts versus firearms, the circulation of weapons following the collapse of the DDR, the unreliability of documentary images and, above all, the way in which Andrea lives on as a militant in the imagery of the Kurdish liberation struggle. Her friend, whose image appears on posters at Kurdish rallies, represents (the film argues) a political period of crisis following the end of the old internationalism of revolutionary politics. November, as the month that follows the upheavals of October's revolutionary activity, is a fragmented, broken time, where stories do not add up and the good guys do not always win. It is a time of doubt: doubt about the old way of doing things, and about the veracity of the storyteller and documentary-maker. One scene sees Steyerl marching solemnly in a protest with a candle, having been asked by a friend to "look sad" and think about Andrea. The image was so convincing it was taken up by the media as representative of the march as a whole. Yet the film shows something very different – seconds later, Steyerl, unable to keep up the pose, breaks away, laughing. We cannot trust this image of authenticity, just as we cannot trust our old ideas about what politics means. We live in a period of uncertainty and volatility. We must continue to fight – but how?

Another of Steyerl's obsessions, alongside the residuum of capitalism's bubbles and hype, is martial arts. Andrea trained Kurdish militants to fight with their hands and a sequence in *November* presents the story of Bruce Lee's death: in Lee's final film, *Game of Death*, real footage of the actor's corpse was used to illustrate his character's faking of his own death. Steyerl's work often makes use of gestures and poses reminiscent of bodily diagrams: the body is a symbol, a pose is a potential weapon. The stances of martial arts are visual signs of a language that has travelled across the world, a mode of pedagogy as well as of fighting.

November above all is an astonishing reminder that the boundaries of the documentary film have in no way been fixed, despite our familiarity with certain forms, some – the anthropological study, the propaganda piece, the poetic film-essay – now a century old. Steyerl's focus on filmmaking itself, its presentation and dissemination, far from being a dry, postmodern exercise, raises serious questions about the way in which we are being told what we know. Even if we are ever more aware of the framing of footage, of editing, of playing with chronology, we are often lulled into believing – wanting to believe – what we see. In Steyerl's work, a position of security is impossible because you can never forget that the filmmaker is herself part of what is what is in question, along with everything the world tries to pretend is business as usual.

Adorno's *Grey* (2012) examines another hidden story that relates to old and new modes of political action, from May 1968 to the London student protests of late 2010. In Frankfurt in 1969, three women bared their breasts during a lecture given by Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno. He ran off, clutching his bag to his chest. A few weeks later, he was dead, some blaming his passing on the female students'



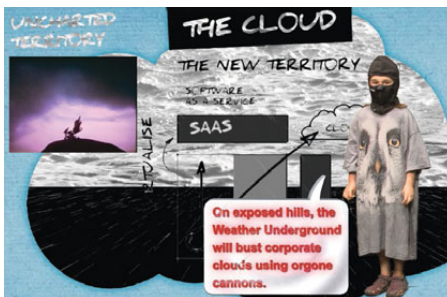
Cabin fever: a crashed Boeing plane, used as a stunt prop for action movies, is the focus of *In Free Fall*

action. Steyerl's film traces the buried history of this event through a typically material intervention: excavating the walls of the lecture theatre in order to find the original grey paint that would have been there at the time of Adorno's ill-fated final lecture. Musings about the breast incident and the philosophical implications of the colour grey form a soundtrack to the careful work of conservators trying to locate the original wall-paint. But the film is the very opposite of watching paint dry, particularly when it comes to the final interview with an anonymous member of the recent 'book bloc' protest group, whose members paint flimsy 'shields' to look like the covers of books. This particular protester carried a shield representing Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* and discusses the moment in one of the anti-fees protests when the book bloc broke out of a police kettle. In the film, the protest movement comes full circle, from the gesture against Adorno in 1969 to the use of the image of Adorno's book to protect the crowd from batons in 2010. Just as in *November*, images travel, the walls have eyes, and ideas have a material reality, even if it is one the police can usually beat back.

Steyerl's interest in politics and art is above all motivated by an enduring love for the lost objects and overlooked ideas of earlier times – not least because they never seem to truly disappear. Indeed, contemporary images are around forever online, surfacing and resurfacing as shared links, memes, visual fads. We live in a period seemingly characterised by endlessly looping gifs filling what Steyerl recently referred to in a

talk at the ICA as "junk time". We do not seem to be able to break out of particular loops of acting and thinking. From shared office photocopies of jokes to online adverts, we are surrounded by images that are copies without an original. In perhaps her most famous essay, 'In Defence of the Poor Image' (2009), Steyerl takes up the cause of the copy, the multiplied image, the image that circulates, what she calls the "lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances". If not outright celebrations of these forgotten images, her films are at least reminders of their complex existence and meaning. Poor images, she tells us "are dragged around the globe as commodities or their effigies, as gifts or as bounty. They spread pleasure or death threats, conspiracy theories or bootlegs, resistance or stultification. Poor images show the rare, the obvious, and the unbelievable." We may look down on the poor image as inferior cultural beings but Steyerl's work, by incorporating them and acknowledging them as ubiquitous and quietly powerful, reveals the complex hierarchy we place on appearances. Rather than bland assurances that we should keep calm and carry on in the face of financial meltdown and political crisis, Steyerl's work demonstrates that we would do better to care about "the rare, the obvious, and the unbelievable". We are all poor images of one kind or another, doomed to circulate amid markets we don't fully understand. Steyerl's work offers a way in to – and even a way out of – this confusing and dangerous parade of shadows. 

 **An exhibition of Hito Steyerl's work is showing at the ICA, London, until 27 April**



Financial times: *Liquidity Inc.*



Motorcycle diaries: *November*

GET MY DRIFT

Often described as an ‘essay film’, Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* is more like a great, seemingly haphazard, jazz performance

By Daniel Barrow

In 1961, Editions du Seuil published *Commentaires*, a collection of the voiceovers Chris Marker had written for his short documentaries. In a publishing industry that confines itself to putting out self-consciously cerebral narrative screenplays, this remains unusual. The commentaries of later films are easily unearthed in full on the web: *Sans Soleil* (1983), with its aphoristic *puncta*, seems particularly suited to the fragmentation machine of the internet and shards turn up all over Tumblr and Twitter. Marker is regarded seemingly as a filmmaker not to be watched but *studied*, read like a novel: academic Nora M. Alter, typically, insists on the “literary” quality of his films. For the kind of middlebrow Anglo-American taste that always found the bare visuality of the cinema too vulgar, Marker transcribed hit just the right note: David Thomson imagines him as an “eighteenth-century traveller” writing, in the voiceovers, genteel filmic journals.

There’s more than a trace of this literary prejudice in the frequent description of *Sans Soleil* as an “essay film”. Marker himself described the film in a letter as being organised “in the fashion of a musical composition, with recurrent themes, counterpoints and mirror-like fugues”. The film’s organisation of its materials – its images, allusions, sound and the implied fictions of its narration – arguably resembles more closely a great jazz performance, a seemingly haphazard dream-structure always on the brink of dissolution that focuses at the last moment to reveal its real craft and complexity. Marker’s editing on *Sans Soleil* has often been praised but few have noted that much of the film is borne on perhaps the most radical sound design since Alan Splet and David Lynch’s work on *Eraserhead*.

Much of the production history of Marker’s films remains obscure but it seems *Sans Soleil* benefited from a small, idiosyncratic crew: Marker had composed the music for his shorts before, creating a dark, hollow synthesiser score for *Three Cheers for the Whale* (1972); Antoine Bonfanti had worked on sound for Godard and *Last Tango in Paris* (1972); his fellow sound mixer Paul Bertault had done duties on both Orson Welles’s essay film *F for Fake* (1974), and Pink Floyd’s concert film *Live at Pompeii* (1972). The film is structured around a voice (Alexandra Stewart in the English version, with an almost parodic cut-glass accent) reading a series of letters from a filmmaker, identified in the credits as ‘Sandor Krasna’. There is already here a subtle alienation effect, as we are jolted by her occasional interjections and comments into remembering the layers of mediation that constitute these intimate dispatches. As theorist Kaja Silverman has pointed out, having a female narrator voice the commentary of a male protagonist estranges the images that Krasna describes as having “replaced my memories”: cinema becomes a form of “heteropathic remembrance”, as images and



The sound of one hand clapping: *Sans Soleil*

language drift between media and subjectivities. (The quality of the voice is important: the first time I watched the French-audio version, narrated by Florence Delay – what a name! – the film became again the bizarre waking dream I first hazily sat through in a lecture theatre years ago.)

Chris Petit has commented that the film’s example of “splitting sound and picture” opened up massive possibilities for a “completely dismantled form of cinema” in the 1980s. Synch sound becomes a selective technique rather than a ubiquitous prop of verisimilitude. Ambient recordings are braided into the soundtrack with voiceover, archival sound, static-haunted music and eddies of synthesiser, its compositional logic closer to the *musique concrète* of Luc Ferrari and Bernard Parmegiani than Walter Murch. Elements drift and intermingle in the mix, with street sound subsumed by electronic noise; everyday sounds are fed through filters and distortion; sudden cuts interrupt passages of sound, as when the warbling synthesiser approximation of Mussorgsky’s *Sunless* that accompanies the

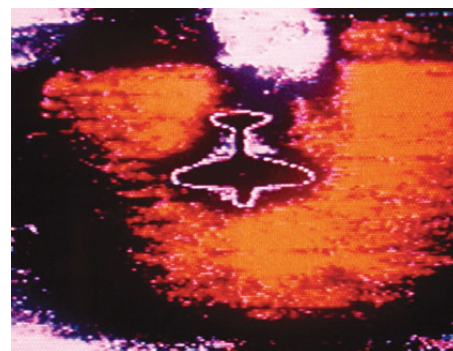
The film is borne on perhaps the most radical sound design since Alan Splet and David Lynch’s work on ‘Eraserhead’

narrator’s description of an imagined film of the same name gives way to silence, cutting to the same shot of three blonde children that began the film, as if the unreconciled world should fall mute before “the image of happiness”.

There is, indeed, a subtle displacement to those passages that apparently use sync sound. In street scenes, as in those shot at the market on Bijagós, crowd noise always seems to come from some offscreen source and overheard speech never quite syncs with those mouths we can see. In the Japanese sections, street noise will sometimes dim or fall away, to be replaced by voices from adverts and TV – we imagine them booming out from the enormous advertisements of Tokyo or the bodies of the animatronic animals that



Chris Marker (right)



Media signals: *Sans Soleil*

populate the frame but they sometimes bleed into neighbouring shots. The line is blurred between technological noise, urban clatter and the signals of a media that is seemingly livelier than the human beings who invented it, in an affirmation of Walter Benjamin's vision of the modern city as the surrealist playground of an uncannily animate technological "second nature", out of sync with itself.

Benjamin imagined that recording and broadcast technology – photography, cinema, sound reproduction – mirrored and intensified the shock-experience of the modern city, an alienation made productive in the juxtapositions of modernist music, from the tape collages of John Cage to Public Enemy. *Sans Soleil* was perhaps the first film since Lang's *Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933) to fully realise the implications of this – perhaps the first post-sampling movie. Marker was in fact using soon-to-be-antiquated tools: the EMS VCS3, synthesiser of choice for experimental and *Kosmische* musicians in the 1970s, and the compact Moog Source would soon be pushed out of the market by the harder-edged sounds of semi-digital machines by the likes of Korg and Roland that can already be heard coming out of the Takenoko dancers' boomboxes. They paralleled the decay of film itself as medium, institution and modernist form that's one of *Sans Soleil*'s submerged themes, with the use of a visual synthesiser in *Sans Soleil*'s Zone sequences presaging the techniques of digital filmmaking. (Marker himself shortly thereafter bought an early Apple model, using it to produce the fuzzy digital images that appear in his ill-fated 1989 miniseries *L'héritage de la chouette*.) The same crisis now faces audio culture under the pressure of digital archives. In an astounding sequence midway through the film, the narrator ruminates on how "memories must make do with their delirium, their drift", as images from the Zone and their originals flash past; on the soundtrack, a naked voice sings an unplaceable song, syllables dragged out as if pressing the fact of suffering against the "memory anaesthetised" of the archive. Just as *Sans Soleil*'s astoundingly fluid editing appears as a mournful final recollection of the memory of film before its disappearance into the Zone, so the intoxicated dream song of *Sans Soleil*'s soundtrack sounds like an inconsolable exhalation from the unquiet grave of modernist cinema. ☹

i A Chris Marker retrospective shows at the Whitechapel Gallery from 16 April to 22 June, with accompanying screenings at the Barbican and Ciné Lumière



Delirium and drift: *Sans Soleil*

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA



A silent film festival on the edge of the Firth of Forth takes place in a venue that's the cinematic equivalent of a hug

By Bryony Dixon

It's a real joy to see silent films in a theatre that was built for them. Up and down the country there are a few surviving cinemas from the early days of film that are still showing movies today. One of the cutest is the Hippodrome in Bo'ness, a small coastal town on the Firth of Forth. It's a perfectly formed art deco jewel with an unusual and cleverly designed circular auditorium: if a cinema could give you a hug, this is what it would feel like. The Hippodrome sits right in the centre of town, enticing you in with a welcoming glow from its exterior lights, as it has since 1912 when it opened.

It was a propitious era for film. A new professionalism was pervading the industry, with the establishment of regular newsreels and the arrival of thrilling adventure serials and the first feature-length films. The first studios were just beginning to be established in Hollywood and as the industry matured films would get their own purpose-built homes for the first time. By 1926, when the Hippodrome had its first refit, silent cinema, art deco and Hollywood were booming.

What better setting, then, for a festival of silent cinema? Since its restoration and reopening in 2009, this remarkable venue has been the platform for a much-needed community festival in Bo'ness: the Hippodrome Festival of Silent Cinema, which shows classic silent films with well-chosen live music, and which enjoyed its fourth edition this March.

The films that I saw in my short stay seemed to take Hollywood as a particular theme, with studio classics like William Wellman's *Beggars of Life* (1928) and Frank Borzage's *Lucky Star* (1929), as well as films heavily influenced by Hollywood such as Yasujiro Ozu's late silent, *Dragnet Girl* (1933). In a programme of classic comedy from the late silent era, a film like Charley Chase's *Limousine Love* (1928) demonstrated perfectly the pitch of perfection to which the Hollywood fun factories had brought the two-reel comedy – a world away from the relatively unsophisticated films of 1912 made by companies like Keystone.

Live music is the key to the success of these events and the festival was able to draw on the best in the business – a multi-talented bunch who can turn their hands to different kinds of accompaniment and programme. Neil Brand, possibly the best-known silent film pianist in the world, accompanied not only *Limousine Love* for the kids' comedy programme but *Lucky Star* on the piano and also *Beggars of Life* with the Dodge Brothers, a band whose Depression-era Americana works fabulously well with certain silent films. A film-savvy mob, their line-up includes

Schoolkids made their own sound effects, scrunching plastic bags to simulate marching feet



Archive footage of troops leaving for World War I



Lucky Star was shown with a live accompaniment

a renowned film critic, Mark Kermode, and a senior lecturer in film, Mike Hammond, who also delivered a stunning lecture on WWI cinema.

Other films in the programme – both accompanied by the versatile Stephen Horne – were European in provenance. Jacques Feyder's beautiful film of an avalanche rescue in the Swiss Alps, *Visages d'enfants* (1925), is now firmly established in the canon of great silent films. Meanwhile, *The Ghost Train* (1927), a witty adaptation of Arnold Ridley's classic play set in a railway station, is as English as *Dad's Army*.

In terms of using silent cinema for community-building, my favourite event was for primary school children. Using films from the Scottish Film Archive of parades of troops leaving their home towns to fight in the Great War, professional storyteller Ewan McVicar drew the kids into the film by encouraging them to make their own soundtrack with songs and sound effects. Cheap-as-chips props included tongue-clicking for horses' hooves and plastic supermarket bags scrunched to simulate marching feet – left, right, left-right-left – an astonishingly effective tactic when deployed by 100 seven-to-eight-year-olds. Best of all was a barrage of artillery explosions made by energetic stomping on balloons. Songs of the era helped connect the children with the soldiers' experience at the human level – it was as if they were there in the crowd a century ago waving them off, creating a sense of continuity and community that this festival and the cinema can foster. Long may the Hippodrome shine its lights on the people of Bo'ness and those lucky enough to visit this lovely festival. ☹

A STUDY IN TERRA



Man of marble: Yuri Ancarani's *Il capo*

This year's AV Festival in the North-East of England, exploring the theme of 'Extraction', proved anything but earthbound

By Isabel Stevens

In 1971, the year after he completed *Spiral Jetty* – one of the 20th century's most famous and monumental art earthworks – Robert Smithson imagined a subterranean cinema. Sited in a cove or an abandoned mine, its screen would be carved out of a rock wall, a makeshift timber projection booth erected and the audience seated on boulders. The viewers would be totally immersed in the cavernous spectacle because – Smithson decreed – the only film showing would be one documenting the cinema's construction. He died two years later, this tantalisingly ambitious cine-geological experiment never realised.

Among artists and filmmakers, the desire to escape *terra firma*, to look up to the skies, is more common. But Smithson is not alone in mating geology with cinema. Since Alberto Cavalcanti's 1934 *Coalface*, experimental filmmakers have been drawn to solid earth. If the cave in Plato's allegory was the first movie theatre (as Chris Marker posited in *The Owl's Legacy*, his 1989 TV series on ancient Greece), cinema's relationship with the ground involves an even older focus.

Working to the theme of 'Extraction', this year's

AV Festival (which ran throughout March at various locations in the North-East of England) gathered together many recent subterranean studies, as well as a collection of non-fiction and artists' moving image work directly focusing on the mining industry and the raw material it extracts. Smithson would no doubt have been delighted to see audiences beetling over barren and craggy landscapes, into caves, quarries, mines and into the bowels of the earth.

The AV has come a long way since its inaugural 2003 edition, transcending its beginnings in new media and digital technology. In the British context it is now a unique hybrid, which most closely resembles an art biennale: it takes place every two years, with a constellation of events, screenings and exhibitions on a chosen theme, in cinemas, museums, galleries and site-specific venues across Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland and Middlesbrough. Its closest relation in terms of film festivals is probably Oberhausen, with its ruminative thematic strands on esoteric subjects (such as 2013's focus on flatness). The AV's approach – with half the festival devoted to sound and with, this edition, two group exhibitions exploring 'Stone' and 'Metal' respectively – ensures that film is always seen and discussed in a wider cultural context, and cinema and artists' films are not isolated from one another.

Two years ago the AV explored 'Slowness', the minimalist style with which a number of key directors have been associated. 'Extraction'

is a far less familiar and prescriptive choice. Coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the Miners' Strike, the programme resonated with the area's industrial past, yet the word's precise, scientific nature makes room for much more than the elegiac.

Many of the commissioned sound and sculptural works responded to the landscape of the North-East. Outstanding among them were Susan Stenger's score for a huge Victorian cross-section diagram of the geological layers of the Northumberland coastline and a Test Dept performance at Dunston Staithes – a mammoth structure once used to load coal on to ships. Of the moving image work, however, only a resurrected live performance of Bill Morrison's 2012 found-footage film *The Miner's Hymn* – a requiem-turned-celebration – engaged directly with the region's history.

While new film commissions would have complemented the many site-specific sonic responses to the theme, their absence didn't harm the festival. Instead, the film programme looked outwards, allowing a broader, more global exploration, while a sidebar dedicated to the industrial films of Wang Bing gave first, long-overdue UK screenings to his epic documentaries such as *West of the Tracks*, a nine-hour survey of a ruined industrial town, and *Crude Oil*, a 14-hour real-time portrait of an oil plant in the Gobi desert.

The lure of the subterranean could be felt throughout the films, especially in the hungry

eyes and gold-obsessed testimonies in several documentaries about miners on the make – from *Big Men*, Rachel Boynton's roving critique of the Ghanaian oil industry, to photographer Andreas Horvath's account of Canadian independent gold-chasers in *Earth's Golden Playground*. The appeal of the subject was most palpable in the exhibition 'Stone', held at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art in Sunderland. Here the focus was on the physical relationship with raw materials, a theme best encapsulated by Harun Farocki's 2007 film *Transmission*, which observes pilgrims and tourists around the world visiting and touching shrines, religious statues and monuments. Two elements make the work: the way Farocki isolates people's hand movements and gestures, highlighting their trance-like states, and the strange and varied sites he surveys in quick succession – from the worn imprint of the devil's foot in a church (supposedly created when Satan stamped his foot in anger at a disobedient medieval congregation, and into which tourists now dip their shoes) to a highly polished Vietnam war memorial reflecting the faces and hands of those drawn up close to the etched-in names of the dead soldiers.

Yuri Ancarani's *Il capo* – one of the most exuberantly cinematic works in the entire festival – explored very different hand movements: those of a quarryman directing the excavation of marble in Italy's Apennine mountain range. In the din of the quarry, his invented sign language is the only means of communicating with the diggers, and the huge machinery responds to the twitch of a finger like an orchestra to a conductor. As *Il capo* progresses, the camera gradually pulls back from these hand movements to reveal this tiny, bare-chested figure perched on a cliff edge, subsumed in white dust while slabs of marble crash around him. Later, in a virtuoso courting of the sublime, the camera glides up out of the quarry and takes in the vista of age-old mountains before hurtling over the edge into a void – the action echoing the motion of the digger's claw, and making clear humanity's fleeting place in geological deep time.

Il capo resonated with other humanist tales of individual lives in the programme, but also with another landscape study, one with some of the most audacious camerawork ever seen: Michael Snow's *La Région centrale*, filmed with a specially designed remote-controlled revolving camera. From one isolated spot in northern Canada, Snow's three-hour 1971 film-painting explores the contours of the surrounding wilderness from



Serra Pelada – the Legend of the Gold Mountain

every possible angle and distance, by daylight and moonlight. As the camera performs its acrobatics around rocks as big as buildings, there's no sign of life to be seen. The film may have fitted the subject only very loosely, since it's not directly concerned with extraction (although the shadow of Snow's long-armed contraption does resemble an oil pump). But no other film came close to conveying what it feels like to be alone in an alien, geologically chaotic landscape.

In most works 'Extraction' was a human, industrial endeavour, but some corners of the programme probed nature's rearrangement, including two very different films about the 2011 tsunami in Japan: *Roots*, Kaoru Ikeya's portrait of a 79-year-old man trying to rebuild his home and community, and *The Radiant*, the Otolith Group's far more cerebral examination of the meltdown of the Fukushima nuclear plant. Another Otolith film, *Medium Earth*, looked at California's seismic activity from the imagined perspective of a narrator who is earthquake-sensitive – a reported but controversial condition, whose sufferers supposedly feel tremors and movements of the earth imperceptible to others. If the narrator's soft-spoken, Markeresque observations occasionally felt strained, the film's muffled soundtrack, magnifying sounds of a shifting landscape, and the camera's slow explorations of the earth's skin were anything but. The small but evocative spectacles the Otolith Group probe –

Victor Lopes's 'Serra Pelada – the Legend of the Gold Mountain' had the most potent image: a mountain hollowed out by desire



An Italian Film (Africa Addio)



Harun Farocki's Transmission

cracks in a concrete car park, scarred rock faces, the desert gradually appearing out of a cloud of dust – make the ground feel like a living being.

Many of the documentaries in the programme were themselves acts of excavation, of unearthing overlooked histories: in Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc's *An Italian Film (Africa Addio)*, the plundering of Congo's copper resources by Belgian entrepreneurs in the 19th century; in Anja Kirschner and David Panos's *Ultimate Substance*, silver extracted from one of the earliest Greek mines, which constituted the classical world's first currency and the foundation on which Greece was built. In *Serra Pelada – the Legend of the Gold Mountain*, Victor Lopes revisited the Brazilian gold rush of the 1980s. Compared to the first two works, which dabbled in reenactment (Kirschner and Panos's slave-miners; Abonnenc's melting down of a 19th-century Congolese copper cross in a Sheffield foundry, which provided a dramatic backdrop to his essay), this last was far less formally and conceptually adventurous, mixing interviews and archive material. But it had the most potent image: a mountain hollowed out by desire. Footage from the 1980s showed the 'gold mountain' covered in a frenzy of ant-like speculators; the site is now a lake which a few hopeful prospectors are still trying to mine.

Most films at AV chose between isolating individual lives and events or musing more widely. *The Forgotten Space*, Noel Burch and Allan Sekula's towering essay-cum-indictment of global capitalism, offered both macro and micro perspectives by focusing on the shipping industry (which according to the filmmakers transports 90 per cent of world trade) and lending a wider perspective to the idea of extraction. Commodities are rarely glimpsed in this film. Instead, Sekula and Burch highlight the brightly coloured shipping container hulks that carry them. In their investigation of the global supply chain they visit giant super-ports and ruined docksides, skyscraper cargo unloaders and Chinese factories. They listen to drivers, engineers, executives, architects, port-workers and migrant labourers; the film's scope is both epic and personal. Clips from old movies (Michael Powell's *Red Ensign*, Josef von Sternberg's *The Salvation Hunters*) and workers' memories recall industrial practices before globalisation. Here Sekula and Burch expose the exploitation of foreign labour that underpins the current system of trade, and the resulting detachment of consumers in developed nations from the production of their goods. The mechanised mega-ports in *The Forgotten Space* felt even more ghostly and sinister next to Bill Morrison's prelude to *The Miner's Hymns*, an aerial tour of Northumberland's collieries – now supermarkets and car parks.

The film has played at other festivals and events in the UK before. For some, that might detract from its inclusion here. But in a festival whose priority isn't novelty but highlighting and analysing myriad approaches to a timely and vital subject, that simply didn't matter. 

For articles on Wang Bing's *West of the Tracks*, Rachel Boynton's *Big Men* and the AV festival's post-colonial cinema weekend, go to bfi.org.uk/sightandsound



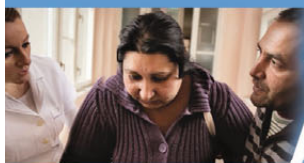
"A real-life national scandal, in which an impoverished Roma couple, portraying themselves, frantically attempt to pay for the wife's life-saving surgery after she miscarriages – facing red tape and prejudice at every corner... quietly compelling and compassionate."

Ali Catterall, TOTAL FILM



"Shot in a visceral docudramatic style, this is a harrowing indictment of the plight of the poor in Eastern Europe that scorches the conscience."

David Parkinson, EMPIRE



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MAYFAIR]

AND SELECTED
CINEMAS
NATIONWIDE

9TH MAY

LEON
LUČEV

PAULIINA
RASÄNEN

RAVIL
SULTANOV

RENÉ
BAZINET

DANIEL
ROVAI

MARJUTA
SLAMIC

LUNA ZIMIC
MIJOVIC

MAKEUP DESIGN ALENKA NAHTIGAL SOUND ROBERT FLANAGAN, DANIEL BIRCH COMPOSER DRAGO IVANUŠA COSTUME DESIGN ALAN HRANITELJ PRODUCTION DESIGN VASJANKELJ EDITING MILOŠ KALUSEK DOP DIVIS MAREK
CO-PRODUCERS PETRI ROSSI, FREDRIK ZANDER, TOMAS ESKILSSON PRODUCERS JOZKO RUTAR, PETRA BAŠIN, MORGAN BUSHE WRITER AND DIRECTOR JANEZ BURGER

Reviews



82 Muppets Most Wanted

With the backstage 'let's put on a show' quality of their stories, their showbiz special guest stars and their built-in hecklers Waldorf and Statler, the Muppets productions have always had a junior Brechtian quality, and this is no exception



60 Films of the month



68 Films



96 Home Cinema



104 Books



Punishing schedule: Macon Blair's heartbreaking performance renders desperate, bereaved lead character Dwight both empathetic and beyond the pale

Blue Ruin

USA/France 2013

Director: Jeremy Saulnier

Certificate 15 90m 14s

See Interview
on page 10

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The opening shots of *Blue Ruin* convey the intrigue and potency of other people's family photographs. Smiley, semi-focused faces peer out

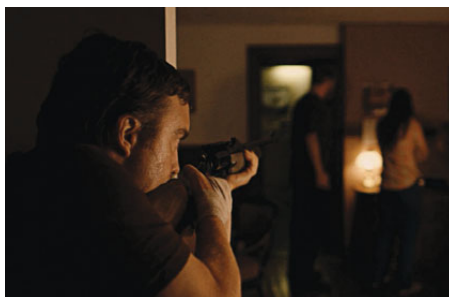
from cheap supermarket frames on the wall. Other faces, other lives, a personal history much like our own perhaps? As we muse on the human commonality between these strangers and ourselves, the camera moves to a steamed-up bathroom and the beardy ginger guy taking a soak, who swiftly jumps out of the window when the property owners and their kids return.

This, we later learn, is Dwight, and his connections to the world of home and family and holiday snaps have been severed, seemingly irrevocably. By day, he's sheltering under the

boardwalk at a Delaware beach, eating from dumpsters, while nights are spent in the rust-bucket Pontiac saloon that gives US indie writer-director-cameraman Jeremy Saulnier's second feature its title. Tellingly, we see him reading a book by torchlight – evidence that he's not completely lost to the civilised world. It's this tension between the realm of warm domesticity and the cold outer limits of modern existence where Dwight finds himself that the film will explore in the next

90 minutes, as Saulnier works intelligent and engrossing variations on the revenge thriller.

Thanks to the intervention of a local police officer, we learn that Dwight has come to this pass as a result of the murder of his parents, whose convicted killer has gained early release. Presenting us with Dwight's situation first and explaining it later allows Saulnier to draw the viewer into the story; it's a technique he uses adeptly throughout the proceedings, aided at every juncture by the soulful presence of leading



In the line of fire: Macon Blair



Amy Hargreaves as Dwight's sister Sam



Saulnier's direction resists the lure of handheld vérité to return to a classical reserve reminiscent of John Carpenter's 'Assault on Precinct 13'

Such is the reality of ending another man's life. It's the moment when Saulnier sets the tone for his approach to material that might, in other hands, have played as an endorsement of vigilantism. It's possible to have sympathy for Dwight, who's clearly no shit-together action hero, but he has to know, and the viewer has to know, what's further on down that dark road now that he's chosen to follow it. By tracing the path of an ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances, Saulnier's film plays the same game of putting us in the protagonist's shoes that French director Fred Cavayé recently managed with such aplomb in *Anything for Her* and *Point Blank*. There are, however, crucial differences here: as well as the intensified sense of ordinariness we get from watching a relatively unknown cast rather than Gallic leading men of the calibre of Vincent Lindon and Gilles Lellouche, there is the added complexity of the audience investing in a protagonist who has gone beyond the law to protect a loved one, taking murderous revenge in the opening reel and then having to deal with the ensuing altered circumstances.

What Saulnier is trying to achieve here is quite a challenge, encouraging empathy yet also maintaining a certain distance, especially when he resists the temptation to have the dialogue editorialise what we're seeing. At one point Dwight admits to an old high-school buddy that "I ain't got no speeches," resisting the *cri de coeur* scene the screenwriting manuals insist is required in this kind of story. Only when the friend, having faithfully provided the guns and advice Dwight seeks, tells him "I'm not helping you because this is right – this is ugly" does Saulnier weaken on his seemingly non-judgemental rigour – though the credible decency conveyed in Devin Ratray's supporting performance stops the line sounding in any way out of place.

Indeed, there's nothing to jar our confidence

in Saulnier's storytelling, since just as Dwight's instincts to protect his sister's family when the Cleland clan comes looking for payback gets us on board with him, so witnessing the awful damage inflicted on the human body by gunshot wounds ("The rest of his head is over there," quakes the squeamish lead) prompts us to ponder. Most impressively, for a relatively inexperienced filmmaker, Saulnier's direction works in the same key, resisting the lure of handheld *vérité* to return to a classical reserve that's most reminiscent of John Carpenter's work on *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) – never displaying camera technique for its own sake, showing us exactly what's required and no more, using the widescreen frame to put plenty of space (and hence potential threat) around our lone central figure. Formally, it's unobtrusive, again encouraging that bond of empathy with the alternately bumbling and resourceful lead, but it's so confident, so masterly in essence, that we sense an overriding intelligence behind the construction.

And yet for all the expert build-and-release of tension and Blair's heartbreaking performance, suggesting a good man inexorably drawn into a vortex of hate, as the film goes on there is also a feeling that ultimately it can't have it both ways, that we can't be both inside and outside Dwight's fateful mission. Saulnier, impressively, has evidently thought this out, for the final confrontation brings in another set of family photographs, jolting us (and Dwight) into recognition of just how far he's strayed from the hearth and home that shaped him. After that, when Dwight does eventually point his rifle in anger, without any dialogue telling us what to think, Saulnier still manages to have us questioning not only the validity of this act, but the justification in this society for making guns available off the shelf and part of the household furniture. A perfectly achieved cinematic moment, it's the culmination of a movie that is surely worthy of the Carpenter or even Jean-Pierre Melville comparisons you might care to throw at it. Yes, it's modest in scale, but its craftsmanship is so genuine, its narrative so considered, its dramatic payoff so visceral, you can't help thinking that if Saulnier can sustain this, we could be looking at the emergence of a major new filmmaker. **S**

man Macon Blair, whose pleading brown eyes and look of bloodhound melancholy make him an immensely sympathetic presence even when his decisions and actions are not just questionable but deeply troubling. Action reveals character, as they say in all the screenwriting manuals, and it's certainly true in this instance, since Dwight, perhaps as a consequence of having lived unmoored from the rest of society, is a man of few words. He doesn't announce that he's going to take his revenge on killer Wade Cleland – he steals a gun from a parked pick-up truck, fails miserably to break its security lock, follows Cleland's vehicle when the latter's family collects him outside the prison gates, then knifes him in the toilets of a roadside diner.

Two contrasting images tell the story here. One is the look on Dwight's face when he knows that his victim is now within his grasp, his expression suddenly engulfed by rage, desperation and fear all at once. The other is the brutal sight of Cleland staring starkly up from the floor as blood pumps out of his head wound. Action reveals character, all right, but actions also have consequences.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Anish Savjani
Richard Peete
Vincent Savino
Written by
Jeremy Saulnier
Photographed by
Jeremy Saulnier
Editor
Julia Bloch
Production Designer
Kael McAnnelly

Original Score
Brooke Blair
Will Blair
Production
Sound Mixer
MacAulay Flynt
Costume Designer
Brooke Bennett
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Production
Companies

A FilmScience & Neighbourhood Watch production in association with Paradise City
A Lab of Madness film
Executive Producers
Skei Saulnier
Macon Blair
Rosemary Edwards
Eileen McGrath
Karen Saulnier

CAST
Macon Blair
Dwight
Devin Ratray
Ben Gaffney
Amy Hargreaves
Sam
Kevin Kolack
Teddy Cleland
Eve Plumb
Kris Cleland

David W. Thompson
William
Brent Wernzer
Carl Cleland
Stacy Rock
Hope Cleland
Sidné Anderson
Officer Eddy
Sandy Barnett
Wade Cleland Jr
In Colour

[2.35:1]
Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment
8,121 ft +0 frames

Delaware, present day. Dwight is homeless, sleeping in his rusty blue Pontiac saloon. He's summoned to the police station to learn that Wade Cleland, convicted of the killing of both Dwight's parents, is being given an early release. When Wade leaves prison, Dwight follows the Cleland family car to a roadside bar, where he stabs Wade to death in the toilets, escaping in the Cleland car, after releasing the latter's son William from the back seat. Dwight drives to his sister Sam's home in Virginia and tells her what he's done; concerned because the Clelands haven't contacted the police, he sends Sam and her children away and waits for the Clelands to show up. Dwight runs over Wade's brother Teddy and himself

receives a crossbow bolt in the leg. Anxious to know if the attackers were targeting Sam, he drives off with Teddy in the boot. Wade needs hospitalisation to treat his wound. He subsequently meets up with old high-school friend Ben, who offers him a gun. Ben later shoots Teddy dead after Dwight is overpowered by his captive. Teddy, however, has already revealed that it was Wade Sr who killed Dwight's parents because Dwight's father had an affair with his wife, fathering William in the process. Dwight travels to the Cleland residence and ambushes Wade's sisters when they return. He's wounded by William, whom he encourages to flee. A further exchange of fire leaves everyone else dead or dying.

Exhibition

United Kingdom 2013

Director: Joanna Hogg

Certificate 15 104m 39s

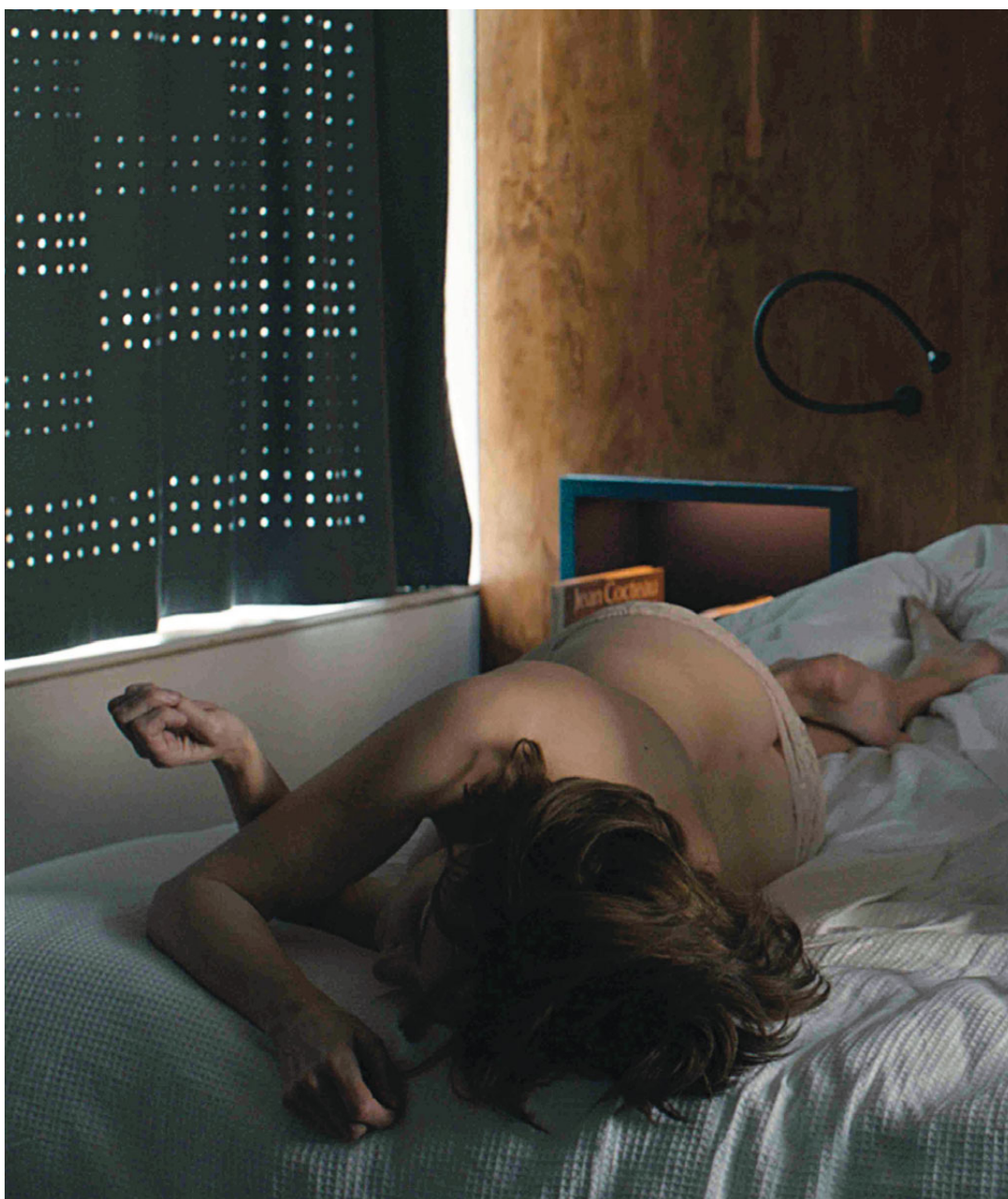
Reviewed by Andrew Tracy

From its outset – a flatly declarative title card leading straight into a shot of D (Viv Albertine, formerly of the punk group The Slits) lying prone, pressed up against a full-length window – *Exhibition* proclaims itself to be an assertively front-facing film: an object knowingly placed on view, inviting or challenging us to contemplate it from outside. The work-in-itself is here also and inextricably a work-on-itself, a commentary on, or interrogation of, its own being – indeed, its very being in the first place commensurate with that commentary. If that self-reflexivity is hardly unprecedented in the history of art cinema, there nonetheless seems to be a more recent urgency about it, given the ongoing and seemingly inevitable transformation of the cinematic medium. The work of almost any great artist always carries with it an implicit *why*: why shoot a scene from here instead of there? Why cut here? Why stop there? Nowadays, the work of artists great and good often seems to be asking, “Why make a film at all?” – or, less drastically, “How to make a film at all?”

This doesn't mean that we should take the creative agonies and stray statements of authorial intent uttered by D and H, the professional artists who are Joanna Hogg's protagonists, as the *tout court* principles of the director's own practice any more than we should in the case of the prattling, buffoonish male filmmakers in Hong Sangsoo's assorted tales of cinema, or the relentless form-and-function philosophising of the directorial pseudo-/neo-/non-avatar in Corneliu Porumboiu's *When Evening Falls on Bucharest* or *Metabolism* (2013). In all these films, however, the distance between subject(s) and maker is being purposely, pointedly reduced; the characters' working-out or working-through of their own creative conundrums and questions is also, to some extent, the work being undertaken by the films in which they appear.

In *Exhibition*, those questions gain in interest as the film builds on a scenario that at first seems like something of a Hanekean readymade, a Londonite riff on the cinema of urban unease and bourgeois self-imprisonment. The stunning-cum-oppressive house – all cubes and floor-to-ceiling glass built around the central coil of a spiral staircase – within which H (played by conceptual artist Liam Gillick) and D enact their mostly unspoken connubial discontent initially seems an almost parodic exaggeration of the Austrian godfather of gloom's sterile interiors, not least in the intercoms via which the couple communicate disembodied queries, requests, veiled barbs and terms of endearment. (“I love you,” says H's crackling voice, over a shot of an empty room – in a weaker film, only the strong could repress a groan.)

These first impressions are only fortified by the de facto disquisition on the everyday tyranny of the bourgeois male that Hogg stages within this (seemingly) despotic space. In H's appeals to D to let him see and comment on her work, Gillick perfectly captures the tone that transforms the nominally helpful into the actually hectoring, while on the physical side Hogg notes how even absence can become



Home is where the art is: Viv Albertine and Liam Gillick as married middle-aged London artists D and H

a form of aggression: the recurring sound of H's office chair rolling across the floor above D's workspace is a neat aural reminder of the patriarchal power pervading this domestic space.

As this (on the surface) imbalanced power dynamic plays out before us, so too do the deceptively rote tropes of the cinema of domestic discontent. Mousy, reserved, with little outside evidence of her artistic labours, D seems the very

model of the dissatisfied, beaten-down *hausfrau*, bridging the divide between covert and overt in closed-door, open-curtain masturbation sessions in her workspace, conveying erotic confessions to a tape recorder as H dozes in their conjugal bed and, unable to verbalise her distress about H's desire to sell their house, rebelling by feigning a faint while at the neighbours' house for dinner.

Hogg is after something more complex here, however, and as the film plays out she qualifies these pervading senses of menace, anxiety and oppression by showing how D feeds them into her inchoate artistic practice. As she gradually adds more layers of staging and preparation to her onanistic endeavours, it becomes evident that these sessions are not (or not only) means of private escape but precursors to public display. And just as Hogg thus blurs the line between psychodrama and art-making, so she shows how D's fragility, though surely deriving at least in part from her domination by both spouse and house, carries its own unspoken strength. The unspecified agoraphobic anxieties that have kept D so often confined to the house are suddenly



A Q&A for D and H in a surreal interlude



Hogg quietly subverts the cultural expectations we bring to such modernist monuments, in films and life both. These spaces do not signify sterility but offer spiritual succour; and, contra the claims of D and H's neighbours that the house is suited to artists rather than families (ie 'real life'), the film's final shot shows children playing within the house, not transforming the space but *using* it.

Hogg is not simply validating old modernist dreams here, however. Not only does she remain acutely aware of the class basis of these aesthetic niceties – D and H's discussions with their brokers speak eloquently to the monetisation of sentiment that undergirds the real-estate business, while that romping clan in the final shot is seen from street level, their domestic bliss safely insulated from the outside world – but the couple's almost ghostly disappearance from the film in the final sequence keeps that original sense of creeping dread alive. Eros is still sick in our post-Antonioni times but on the evidence here Apollo isn't exactly in the pink either. If art can still provide us with liberatory spaces, we're now inescapably aware of how bound up it is with forces of oppression, domination and entrapment. It's surely this awareness that has relentlessly steered the discourse of art away from the finished product and towards 'process' and 'practice', the work-in-itself towards sheer working – for if art remains perpetually unfixed, there is still a (distant) possibility of avoiding those pitfalls. "I want the work to be ongoing throughout the time I'm there, with no end in sight," says D of her prospective exhibition. "Every day will be something different. I'll improvise and make mistakes and take wrong turns and it will all be there, for all to see." There's surely some conscious irony at work in the fact that this paean to the protean comes at the end of such a polished, purposeful and meticulously constructed film. 

The film at first seems like something of a Hanekean readymade, a Londonite riff on the cinema of urban unease and bourgeois self-imprisonment

overturned when she gussies herself up and heads out for a surreal/imagined solo night on the town, which concludes with her impossibly watching herself from an audience as she and H engage in an onstage discussion about her refusal to discuss her work with him. The bad/no sex of the film's early passages (at one point D lies like a rag doll on the bed as H fruitlessly attempts to awaken her erotic interest, or at least participation) is dispelled by episodes of joyful rutting between the two, some imagined but some apparently actual.

Furthermore, and crucially, D's neo-Antonionian posturing and lolling about the house's stark modernist interiors are revealed to be not a pantomime of alienation but an attempt to feed off the building's energies, both its aesthetic dynamism and the lived experience imbued within its walls. At one point, D speaks to a friend via Skype about her regret over selling the house, mentioning that the previous occupants had lived there into their eighties; indeed, the actual house was built by architect James Melvin as a home for himself and his wife after their children had grown up and moved out. Thus

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Gayle Griffiths
Written by
Joanna Hogg
Director of Photography
Ed Rutherford
Editor
Helle le Fevre
Production Designer
Stéphane Collonge
Production

Sound Mixer
Howard Peryer

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Production Companies
BFI and BBC present
in association
with Rooks Nest
Entertainment a

Wild Horses Film
co-production
Made with the support
of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Lizzie Francke
Christine Langan
Ed Wethered
Michael Sackler
Julia Godzinskaya
Film Extracts
Caprice (1986)

CAST

Viv Albertine
D
Liam Gillick
H
Sirine Saba
woman in car
Harry Kershaw
Tom Hiddleston
estate agents
Mary Roscoe
Christopher

McWatters
neighbours
Julienne
Dolphin-Wilding
Skype friend
Mark McCabe
builder
Chris Wilson
Daryl Francis
paramedics
Jared Wakefield
photographer

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

9,418 ft +8 frames

London, present day. D and H are a middle-aged married couple, both professional artists, who live and work in an imposing modernist home. Their day-to-day existence comprises a series of familiar routines: independent work in their respective studios, household errands, strolls in a local park and the occasional dinner with their next-door neighbours. The more voluble H has evidently been trying for some time to convince D to invite his input on her work but D evades or gently resists his requests.

Having lived in the house for 18 years, H now believes they should sell it and build a property elsewhere. Despite D's obvious reluctance to leave, H engages estate agents and puts the house on the market. Shortly afterwards,

D receives an offer of a solo exhibition of her work, which she does not mention to H. Her studio sessions, previously rather inchoate, become more involved, including masturbation, voyeurism, costumes and light bondage.

The house is eventually sold. As they are packing, D informs H about her exhibition and offers a general outline of her intentions, involving illustration, performance and day-to-day improvisation. On one of their last days in the house, D looks out the window and sees an old man carrying an infant down the street.

Later, we see a young couple and their three children playing in the house.



Maid for him: Filipina maid Teresa (Angeli Bayani) takes care of Jiale (Koh Jia Ler), the ten-year-old son of a Chinese couple living in Singapore in 1997

Ilo Ilo

Director: Anthony Chen
Certificate 12A 99m 23s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Let's get a hard truth out of the way first: Anthony Chen is not the new Orson Welles. *Ilo Ilo* has won so many festival prizes since it took the Caméra d'or for best debut feature in Cannes that anyone coming to it fresh might expect something as maverick as *Citizen Kane*. The film is emotionally astute, broadly credible and aesthetically conservative: in no way maverick. It's far less innovative and striking than some other recent features from Singapore, so its festival success seems at best disproportionate. How to account for all those prizes? Since 2013 was not a particularly thin year for debut features, there must be an awful lot of festival jurors racked with middle-class guilt about neglecting their children and resenting their child-minders.

The film is set in Singapore in 1997, as the East Asian economic crisis begins to bite, and centres on the Lim family, lower-middle-class Chinese with a 10-year-old son and a baby on the way. Both parents have jobs, and the son Jiale

(Koh Jia Ler) is showing typical symptoms of neglect: in the opening school scene he feigns injuries to his arms so that he can threaten to accuse his teacher of abuse by way of escaping punishment for some other infraction. The parents respond to Jiale's discipline problems at school in a routine Singaporean way by hiring a foreign child-minder-cum-domestic help, even though their small, housing-estate apartment has no spare room for her. They opt for a Filipina rather than a Malaysian or Indonesian woman simply because they don't speak Malay but do speak the rather primitive form of English known locally as 'Singlish'. The film doesn't specify its exact timeframe – the wife Hwee-Leng (Yeo Yann Yann) is visibly pregnant from the start and gives birth in the coda – but the action spans the few months that 28-year-old Teresa (Angeli Bayani), from *Ilo Ilo*, is with the family.

Across those few months, the spoilt and selfish Jiale bonds with Teresa in a way that he never has with his mother. The process is deftly sketched, from the way the boy expresses his hatred and resentment of his new minder by framing her for shoplifting to the way he snips a lock of her hair (without asking) in the taxi which has brought her to the airport to fly home. Two well-observed scenes mark the turnaround

in Jiale's attitude to Teresa. In the first, after he's broken his arm in a traffic accident while running away from her, Teresa strips the boy naked in the bathroom to help him shower and then indulges him in a water fight. In the second, Jiale is genuinely chastened when Teresa slaps him for making light of a neighbour's suicide – the first time in the film (and probably in his life) that the boy accepts punishment as deserved. The boy's journey from instinctive hatred to inarticulate affection provides the main narrative arc and gives the film its emotional dynamic. It's fleshed out with such incidental details as Jiale's learnt preference for Teresa's spicy cooking over his mother's bland efforts in the kitchen. Rather admirably, Jiale is hardly less obnoxious at the end than he was at the start.

The handling of Hwee-Leng's jealousy over Teresa's success with the boy is less skilful. When Teresa arrives, Hwee-Leng gives her a bundle of hand-me-down clothes, intended for the charity shop, inviting her to wear any she likes. Predictably, whenever Teresa does don her employer's cast-offs, Hwee-Leng is suspicious and critical. The issue comes to a head when Jiale faces expulsion from school for injuring another boy in a fight. The Indian headmistress is initially unable to reach either parent by



Emotionally astute and broadly credible, this multiple festival prize-winner is less innovative and striking than other recent films from Singapore

alone and deflated. To be a viable dramatic strand, the tension between working mother and maid needed to be more nuanced and sustained.

Even less successful are the two awkward scenes in which Teresa calls home from a public telephone on the housing estate. We learn from her end of the conversations that she has an infant son of her own, an alcoholic husband and a sister who's ready to bail out of her child-minding agreement. These scenes allow Chen to compare Teresa's unseen home life in Ilo Ilo with the difficult-but-better situation of the Lim family and they provide an equally glib motivation for Teresa to go off in search of extra income from a secret part-time job in a hair salon. But they add nothing of substance to the film and have no bearing on Teresa's evolving relationship with Jiale, so why are they really there?

Maybe the film's two titles offer a clue. The export title *Ilo Ilo* references Teresa's home in the Philippines, as if it's meant to serve as a significant offscreen presence. The Chinese title *Ba Ma Bu Zai Jia* (which means "Dad and mum are not at home") refers specifically to the Lim household and implies the root cause of Jiale's problematic behaviour. Since they suggest political and conceptual dimensions that the film palpably lacks, neither title fits too well. But both suggest a director hankering for meanings larger than his slim anecdote can sustain.

In fact, the film is largely autobiographical. Chen stresses in interviews that the fictional Lim family doesn't exactly mirror the real-life Chen family in 1997 but admits that "a lot of moments [are] taken from real life". (He also tells us he flew Teresa's real-life prototype from Ilo Ilo to Singapore for the premiere.) The film's basis in lived experience doubtless explains why it works so well as an understated domestic melodrama, and perhaps also why it can't measure up to the ambitions suggested by its titles.

Chen, who studied film at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Singapore and at the NFTS in Beaconsfield, has expressed understandable hopes that his film's triumphs on the festival circuit

phone and Teresa dashes to the school to plead for leniency. Hwee-Leng then bursts in on the meeting, sends Teresa out and subsequently upbraids her for taking the parental role – and for wearing her own old dress. Rather than showing how the situation pans out, Chen ends the scene with a 'poignant' shot of Teresa left

will help kick-start a "new wave for cinema in Singapore". Time for another hard truth: despite the Singapore government's dogged attempts to will a film industry into being (spurred, it seems, by its rivalry with Hong Kong) by throwing subsidies at would-be filmmakers, the fact is that the way Singapore runs itself is actively inimical to a rich film culture.

The best Singaporean films have been oppositional, from Eric Khoo's dystopian visions of underclass rage to Boo Junfeng's retrieval of the suppressed history of communist revolt in *Sandcastle* – not to mention Tan Pinpin's recent documentary *To Singapore, with Love*, which chronicles the fate of the intellectuals and activists who were driven into exile in past decades. Singapore runs on puffed-up nationalism, tight social control, silencing of dissent and censorship – exactly the conditions that make 'culture' all but impossible. *Ilo Ilo* certainly doesn't present a rosy picture of Singapore in the late 1990s: its 'vision' extends to a random, unexplained suicide, a glimpse of street prostitution at Lucky Plaza and the formal, public administration of corporal punishment. But Chen fails to make the leap from close observation to analysis. His film explores one family's economic and parenting problems with some clarity but not the larger picture that might explain why this family thinks and behaves as it does. Fine, as far as it goes – but it's not enough. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Ann Hwee Sim
Yuni Hadi

Screenplay

Anthony Chen

Director of Photography

Benoit Soler

Editors

Chen Ho Ping

Art Director

Joanne Cheong

Sound Designer

Michael Wee
Zhe Wu

Production Companies

Singapore Film Commission, Ngee Ann Polytechnic presents a Fisheye

Pictures production
With the support of
Singapore National Arts Council

Executive Producers

Anita Kuan
Gina Lau
Ivan Tan
Leong Sze Hian
Ng Aik Hock

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Soda Pictures

8,944 ft +8 frames

Chinese
theatrical title
Ba Ma Bu Zai Jia

CAST

Yeo Yann Yann
Hwee-Leng
Chen Tian Wen
Lim Keng Teck
Angeli Bayani
Teresa
Koh Jia Ler
Jiale

Singapore, 1997. Lim and his pregnant wife Hwee-Leng both have jobs (he as a salesman for a glass-making company, she as a secretary in a shipping firm) and start to worry that their 10-year-old son Jiale is showing delinquent tendencies at school. They decide to hire a Filipina maid, Teresa from Ilo Ilo, hoping that she will calm the boy. Jiale is initially hostile to Teresa but after he breaks an arm while playing up he starts to accept her help, slowly warming to her. Lim is fired from his job and the best he can find in the burgeoning economic crisis is work as a watchman; immigrant workers are also being laid off at the shipping firm. Teresa hears that her own infant son back home needs extra care and finds a low-paying job in a Filipino hair salon to boost her wages. Lim tells his wife he has lost money on stocks. Hwee-Leng increasingly resents Jiale's closeness to Teresa and signs up to a self-help course which turns out to be a scam. Jiale hurts another boy in a fight at school and is forced to undergo corporal punishment at a school assembly. Lim quits as a watchman after an accident and tells his wife that they will have to fire Teresa. Jiale is distraught and snips a lock of Teresa's hair when they take her to the airport for her flight home. Lim finds Jiale listening to Pinoy pop. In hospital, Hwee-Leng gives birth to another son.



Family fortunes: the Lims are affected by the East Asian economic crisis



Hands of a stranger: Ursula Bedena as Edwige

The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears

Belgium/France/Luxembourg 2013
Directors: Bruno Forzani, Hélène Cattet
Certificate 18 101m 48s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears (*L'Etrange Couleur des larmes de ton corps*) depicts the search of middle-aged telecommunications executive Dan Kristensen (Klaus Tange) first for his missing wife Edwige, then for a mysterious bearded man who keeps disappearing and reappearing, and finally for a secret long buried in the 19th-century art nouveau building that Dan calls home. But the film is also itself in search of its title's meaning, building slowly and inexorably towards a climactic revelation that fleshes out in full colour a primal scene previously glimpsed only in evolving, impressionistic visions of black and white.

The title itself is an enigma, a challenge and a hermeneutic gambit, beginning with a promise of defamiliarisation ('strange') and ending with an odd kenning ('body's tears') that, at least in its English version, involves significant equivocation. For while in normal usage the French '*larmes*' can only denote lachrymal secretions, its English translation 'tears' might additionally, depending on how it is pronounced, evoke the rips, holes, wounds, splits and gashes that will form a recurrent, eroticised motif in the film. (Though initially unaware of these further implications in their film's English title, writing/

directing couple Bruno Forzani and Hélène Cattet have revealed to me their delight with them.)

The appearance of the title in bold, scarlet capitals may prime viewers to have an idea of what the 'strange colour' may be (and also what 'body's tears' will most likely signify, given the sanguineous hue being associated with them) but cinematographer Manuel Dacosse's liberal use of filters, as well as the prominent presence of stained-glass windows, subsequently brings plenty of other colours to the palette – and yellow will come to dominate no less than deep red. After all, this film, like Forzani and Cattet's feature debut *Amer* (2009), steepes itself in the grammar, iconography and scores (here lovingly

magpied) of the sensationalist mystery genre known as *giallo* (Italian for 'yellow'), named for the trademark sleeve colour of the lurid Italian pulp novels that were its inspiration. Indeed, even the title is an allusive pastiche of such *gialli* as Sergio Martino's *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (AKA *Blade of the Ripper*, 1971) and *All the Colors of the Dark* (1972) or Giuliano Carnimeo's *What Are Those Strange Drops of Blood Doing on Jennifer's Body?* (AKA *The Case of the Bloody Iris*, 1972) – all starring Edwige Fenech, whose forename is shared by a key (if absent) character here. By the time the closing credits roll, this most polysemic of titles has transformed once again, recurring with the word '*couleur*' slightly altered to '*douleur*',



The double: Klaus Tange plays dual roles as telecoms executive Dan Kristensen and Detective Vincentelli

as though to acknowledge that by now bodily emissions have become firmly associated (at least in one disturbed character's mind) with both mental anguish and physical pain. There is also, in that *étrange douleur*, something of the pangs of nostalgic melancholy that the viewer has come to experience during the film's confounding journey back to childhood. For although *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears* appears to be set in the present day, its retro *giallo*-esque gestures, its outmoded gramophones and tape reels, the marked absence of computers or digital devices and the resemblance of its protagonist's apartment to a 70s bachelor pad all point back to the age of the hero's youth, if not necessarily his innocence.

While Dan has been away in Frankfurt on business, Edwige has vanished from their elegant Brussels apartment with the door still on the latch, setting up what appears to be a classic locked-room mystery – yet the building, with its Escher-like labyrinth of *trompe-l'oeil* perspectives, paradoxical passageways and hidden recesses, appears increasingly to mirror the state of Dan's tormented mind as he repeatedly chases his own tail in pursuit of an elusive memory well-immured in his own unconscious. The idea that this entire narrative might be quite literally psychedelic, exposing the inner architectonics of a damaged brain, is first suggested by the film's opening scene, in which Dan is shown falling asleep on a plane. If everything that follows this is a nightmarish flight of fancy taking place entirely within the solipsistic confines of Dan's own headspace, then that would certainly explain why the film is so overtly oneiric in its disregard for spatio-temporal continuities; or why Tange plays not only Dan but also the detective who subsequently helps him look for Edwige; or why, in one extraordinary sequence, Dan finds himself divided schizophrenically between the roles of predator, victim and voyeuristic eyewitness during a grotesque, razor-sharp invasion of both his home and his body.

As Dan takes his frantic enquiries from floor to



The horror, the horror: Hans de Munter

floor, picking up from the neighbours cryptically connected tales of missing persons, anxious husbands, sadomasochistic eroticism and of course blood, we too become lost in the Chinese-box structure of stories within stories – and storeys within storeys – all painting a fractured portrait of a disturbed, deeply repressed man and his conflicted attitude (of both desire and disgust) towards women, traceable all the way back to a boyhood trauma rooted in biology. As such, *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears* is the perfect

The building, with its Escher-like labyrinth of trompe l'oeil perspectives, appears increasingly to mirror the state of the protagonist's tormented mind

companion piece to Forzani and Cattet's *Amer*, continuing to distil the language of *giallo* down to its sensory quintessence, while refocusing the earlier film's disorienting subjectivity from a female to a male perspective. Here, *giallo* is also renationalised into peculiarly Belgian idioms: the mannered buildings of Victor Horta play a significant part in the film's design (Dan's mazelike apartment complex is in fact formed from a composite of seven different houses); and even René Magritte's iconic bowler hat makes an aptly surreal cameo, haunting the dreamlike experiences of a woman in another locked room.

Not only is Dan's psyche refracted through a convoluted series of dizzyingly asymmetric structures (both architectural and narrative) but also all manner of stylistic gestures are brought in to play to enhance the way the film constantly confounds and unsettles the viewer – although the style, far from compromising the substance, becomes its uncanny vehicle. If the screen is at times split, so too is the protagonist's mind. If one sequence is presented in a series of flickering monochrome stills, this finds its echo (and is decoded) in a subsequent scene in which a young boy is shown flipping through the pages of a softcore magazine (entitled *Plaisir*). If, in the opening credit sequence, different images of the building's exterior are made to rotate and blur as though part of a kaleidoscope or Rubik's cube, this anticipates the twin motifs of childish things and recovered meaning. Everything here is intelligently, if oddly, constructed to create a puzzle the viewer can revisit and piece together in multiple configurations.

So no matter if you cannot always tell Dan and Detective Vincentelli apart, or if Edwige, Barbara, Dora and Laura (the latter significantly sharing her name with the late titular heroine of Otto Preminger's 1944 film) all begin to blur into one (much as they do in Dan's mind) – the key here is to find a way through the film's dark, secret places to the very heart of its reverse-engineered murder mystery. Alternatively, just surrender wholly to the heady psychosexual odyssey so consummately charted by the filmmakers. For this synaesthetic fever dream, working hand in glove with the tropes of *giallo* to build its own hermetic world, is a deliriously unnerving (and violent) model for 'total cinema' at its most hyper-sensual and polychromatic – period. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Eve Commenge
François Cognard
Written by
Bruno Forzani
Hélène Cattet
Director of Photography
Manu Dacosse
Editor
Bernard Beets
Art Director
Julia Irribarria
Sound Recordist
Yves Bemelmans
Costumes
Jacky Fauconnier

©Anonymes Films, Tobina Film, Epidemic, Red Lion
Production Companies
Anonymes Films, Tobina Film presents
In co-production with Epidemic, Red Lion, Mollywood
With the support of Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, VOO (TV-Net-Tel), Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge, Fonds Audiovisuel Flamand,

Go West Invest, Région Lorraine in partnership with CNC, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, MEDIA Production Guarantee Fund
With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, BE TV, Fonds National de Soutien à la Production Audiovisuelle du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg
In co-production with Belgacom
In association with Indéfimms An Anonymes Films and Tobina Film co-production

CAST

Klaus Tange
Dan Kristensen/
Detective Vincentelli
Ursula Bedena
Edwige
Birgit Yew
Dora
Sam Louwyck
Jean-Michel Vovk
Sylvia Camarda
Anna D'Annunzio
Joe Koener

Hans de Munter
Manon Beuchot
Romain Roll
Lolita Oosterlynck
Delphine Bruhal

Dolby Digital
In Colour and Black and White [2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

9,162 ft +0 frames

Belgian theatrical title
L'étrange couleur des larmes de ton corps
Belgian end credits title
L'étrange douleur des larmes de ton corps
English subtitles end credits title
The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears

Telecommunications businessman Dan Kristensen falls asleep on a plane. Back in Brussels, he discovers that his wife Edwige is missing from their locked apartment. Helped in his investigation into this mystery by Detective Vincentelli, Dan hears strange stories of anxiety, disappearance, sadomasochism and bloody death from several neighbours, including 'crazy old woman' Dora, the dominating Barbara, landlord Dermont and an elusive bearded man. Convinced that someone is watching him from within the apartment, Dan finds an audio reel of a woman expressing her desire to make him suffer, and notepaper with '7' (the number of Barbara's apartment) written on it. After a wounding sexual encounter with Barbara, Dan wakes besides Edwige's severed head (which has a deep gash in the skull). Dan is plagued by nightmares of home invasion. Dermont reads the diary of a woman beleaguered by a bowler-hatted, razor-wielding spectre. After revealing to Dan that hidden passages connect the apartments, the bearded man is murdered. Seeing Barbara about to stab the drugged and straddled Dermont, Vincentelli shoots her. In room 7, Vincentelli finds a woman's body (with skull gash) and, in a box marked 'Laura', an album with photographs of various women (including Edwige). After he shoots at a mirrored cupboard and a body (with skull gash) falls out, Vincentelli is stabbed. Through a hole in his bathroom wall, Dan enters a secret labyrinth leading to a red door marked 'L' (an inverted '7'), behind which a young, horrified boy watches the adolescent Laura bleeding from between her legs.

After the Night

Switzerland/Portugal 2013
Director: Basil da Cunha

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Portuguese cinema is generally known for its poetic rather than its realist tendencies, or – in the case of Pedro Costa – for its intense poeticisation of harsh urban realities. *After the Night*, however, is a striking instance of urban realism, albeit with poetic tinges, and this may or may not be partly to do with its outsider status: this is a Swiss production, and writer-director Basil da Cunha is himself Swiss, of Portuguese origin. Nevertheless, *After the Night* could hardly be more specifically rooted: its setting is the ghetto of Reboleira, on the outskirts of Lisbon, populated, like the Fontainhas district of Costa's films, by the families of black immigrants from Cape Verde.

This intriguing but minor-key and somewhat unfocused film could at first glance be considered a generic example of the ghetto crime drama: the story of an outsider living to his own rules (and, in this case, his own nocturnal timetable) who resists being drawn into the collectivity of gang life and who tries too late to straighten out his troubled existence, achieving a last-minute transcendence in death. Sombra (meaning 'shadow') is aptly named: he travels on rooftops as much as at street level; he shuns daylight and electricity alike for a simple oil lamp, which he often carries around like a talisman; and his closest companion is his pet iguana, which, he admits ruefully, he is depriving of the sun that it needs. Taciturn and generally 'other', the dreadlocked Sombra is considered unfathomably weird by gang leader Olos and his crew, whose own lifestyle, dress and language adhere to conventional gangsta codes. Meanwhile he has a sort of kindred spirit in another loner, Nuvm (meaning 'cloud'), a contemplative soul who apparently holds down a labouring job and who advises Sombra to start living by day (ironic, given that Nuvm too seems to spend his nights wandering the streets).

Working with convincingly rough-edged non-professionals, seemingly using improvisation, da Cunha vividly catches the energy of this milieu. The film is liveliest when the slender narrative gives way to scenes of people hanging out and talking, such as the extended chat about a prospective fish dinner in the dilapidated courtyard that is Olos's HQ, and later a street-corner football conversation. There are also a couple of energetic talkings-to from Susana Maria Mendes da Costa as Sombra's solicitous, no-nonsense aunt – although her relationship with him cleaves a little too familiarly to the duo template of the tough-love matriarch and the potentially redeemable bad boy, as seen in so many gang dramas.

Much of the film is steeped in the international lingua franca of black street culture, but *After the Night* is most intriguing for its mix of generic and specific cultural references: along with the hip hop, we also get live music at parties and on street corners, including a local reggae derivative and plenty of distinctively Luso-Brazilian accordion. Overall in its cultural mix this feels less like a European, still less an American gang movie, and closer to Brazil's favela dramas, especially in Sombra's visit to the neighbourhood *bruxo* (witch doctor) Mr Julio, who practises a syncretic mixture of Catholic and African magic. This



They live by night: Pedro Ferreira, José Zeferino da Cruz

exorcism session is treated realistically but magic filters into the film elsewhere, notably in Sombra's subsequent rampage through the streets – whether as a result of the exorcism or from delirium caused by a bullet wound – as he waves his machete and launches into a dervish dance. This is a prelude to the sudden, silent appearance of a gang member whom Sombra believed he had killed, and whom he recognises as a ghost.

The film's significant flaw is perhaps in the casting of Pedro Ferreira as Sombra, his taciturn presence never quite making it apparent why it is worth following this character rather than any other (given that other cast members are more charismatic). Ferreira's performance comes into focus in two scenes in particular – when he launches into a strangely incantatory rant about omens of death, and when he confides his pet iguana to the care of a small girl, Clarinha (a very unselfconscious performance by the magnificently named

Ana Clara Baptista de Melo Soares Barros).

Sombra's nocturnal habits set the visual tone: there are few daylight sequences, and the chiaroscuro – tinted deep orange by streetlights – is atmospherically shot by Patrick Tresch, though the density of the darkness often makes the film hard to read, especially in the crucial sequence where shots are exchanged during a gang mission.

Not unexpectedly, the film ends in broad daylight, with Sombra finally achieving the liberation that has earlier been presaged – with only the faintest glimmer of sentiment – by a conversation with Clarinha about their going to live with his iguana (or 'dragon', as they call it) on the moon. As for the final close-up of the lizard – at last getting its moment in the sun, and seemingly embodying Sombra's freed soul – whether you find this image magic or bathetic may depend on whether or not you remember a similar use of an animal as correlative for a tragic hero in Vincent Gallo's *The Brown Bunny* (2003). **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Elena Tatti
Written by
Basil da Cunha
Director of Photography
Patrick Tresch
Editing
Renata Sancho
Basil da Cunha
Emilie Morier
Art Direction
Carlos Baessa
de Brito
Production Sound Mixer
Filipe Tavares

©Box Productions,
HEAD - Genève, Basil
da Cunha, RTS
Production Companies
Box Productions and
HEAD - La Haute École
d'Art et de Design,
Genève/Geneva
University of Art
and Design present
in co-production
with RTS - Radio
Télévision Suisse
Production
Sound Mixer
Filipe Tavares

of Cinéforum
supported by La
Loterie Romande
With the support
of Pour-Cent
Culturel Migros
In collaboration with
O Som e a Fúria
A film by Basil
da Cunha
A production of Box
Productions, Geneva
University of Art and
Design - Département
Cinéma/Cinéma
du Réel, HES-SO
(Haute école
spécialisée de Suisse

occidentale, Geneva)
Film Extracts
(Audio only)
Rashomon (1950)

Cast

Pedro Ferreira
Sombra
João Veiga
Olos
Nelson da Cruz
Duarte Rodrigues
Nuvm
Paulo Ribeiro
Mix
Francisco Mota
Tchicks

José Milton Moreira
Osfera
Ruben Dias
Franguinho
Carlos Rodrigues
Fonseca
Kikas
Susana Maria
Mendes da Costa
Sombra's aunt
Euclides Mendes
Fernandes
Kiki
Ana Clara
Baptista de Melo
Soares Barros
Clarinha
José Zeferino

da Cruz
Dr Júlio, 'Bruxo'

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Capricci Films

Swiss theatrical title
Après la nuit
Onscreen
Portuguese title
Até ver a luz

Reboleira, Portugal, the present. Drug dealer and loner Sombra owes money to gang leader Olos, who suspects him of stealing from him. Sombra tries unsuccessfully to collect money owed to him, then visits his aunt's flat, where he keeps his money. Eventually Sombra goes to repay Olos but is told he has left it too late. Olos sends him out with other gang members on a job; in the process, shots are

fired, one man is killed and Sombra escapes with a bullet wound. Preparing to leave town, Sombra says goodbye to his friend Nuvm, confides his pet iguana to the care of a little girl named Clarinha, and visits witch doctor Mr Júlio, who exorcises him of evil spirits. Captured by the gang, Sombra is driven to the beach, where he is ordered to shoot a gang member – but Sombra is shot instead.

Almost Married

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Ben Cookson
Certificate 15 98m 2s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

"It'll be funny when we look back at it... most shit things are," promises Jarvis during his friend Kyle's stag weekend – although this is before they discover that the groom-to-be has chlamydia.

Much of the ensuing comedy concerns Kyle's efforts to cover up a drunken visit to a prostitute – efforts that range from crude (feigning an interest in 'midget porn') to dark (considering inducing a coma). The latter comedy strand is more effective but both quickly wear thin. Debut writer-director Ben Cookson draws more laughs from awkward situations with larger groups, whether at family dinners or in brothels. He seems torn between exploring characters' relationships and milking them for cheap laughs, only settling on the former at the film's conclusion, which proves surprisingly imaginative for a sex comedy.

Rather like a conspiracy thriller, the final scene invites the audience to replay the film mentally from a different perspective. Not necessarily funny when you look back at it but certainly more interesting. 

Emily Attack,
Philip
McGinley



Credits

Produced by
Lionel Hicks
Written by
Ben Cookson
Cinematographer
Si Bell
Editor
Steve Clark
Production Designer
Celina Norris
Composer
Holley Gray
Sound Recordist
'Aris' George Aris
Anastassopoulos
Costume Designer
Florence Chow

©Almost Married
Production Companies
Tested Films in association with

Liquid Noise
Films presents
Executive Producers
Fumiko Thomas
Dominique Devoucoux
Vanessa Lorena Tate

CAST

Philip McGinley
Kyle
Mark Stobart
Jarvis
Emily Attack
Lydia
Andrew Wilkinson
Kyle's dad
Bill Fellows
Lydia's dad
Laura Norton
Melanie
Janine Birkett

Kyle's mum
Allison Dean
Lydia's mum
Harvey Halfpenny
Alfie
Sammy T. Dobson
Crystal
Ellie Fletcher
Helen
Tracey Wilkinson
Wendy
Lynne Wilmot
Sue

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Tested Films
8,823 ft +0 frames

Newcastle, the present. After visiting a brothel on his stag night, Kyle discovers that he has chlamydia and must wait 90 days to test for HIV. He avoids sex with fiancée Lydia, who becomes suspicious. His best man Jarvis advises him to tell her: "I swear on the health and happiness of everyone I hold dear, I have not cheated on you." Lydia becomes distant and Kyle is increasingly desperate. Jarvis suggests asking the prostitute to take an HIV test. The prostitute reveals that Kyle had been incapable of sex. At a family dinner, Kyle accuses Lydia of cheating. She denies it, swearing "on the health and happiness of everyone I hold dear" that she caught an STD from sharing a sex toy. Kyle walks out.

Calvary

United Kingdom/Ireland 2013
Director: John Michael McDonagh
Certificate 15 100m 52s



Diary of a hunted priest: Brendan Gleeson, Chris O'Dowd

See Feature
on page 30

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Considerably darker than his 2011 comedy thriller *The Guard*, John Michael McDonagh's second feature proposes a teasing but highly serious examination of the question of faith and uncertainty. The director's statement summarises *Calvary* thus: "The *mise en scène* indebted to Andrew Wyeth. The philosophy to Jean Améry. The transcendental style inspired by Robert Bresson."

The film's coastlines and fields – shot by Larry Smith, sometimes in ominously swooping aerial shots – echo Wyeth's landscape paintings, and one can see how the questioning of brutality and inhumanity might be influenced by Austrian-born essayist Améry and his writing on the Holocaust. As for Bresson, *Calvary* has a livelier tone than "transcendental style" might suggest. McDonagh has also described his film as "Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* with a few gags thrown in". Gags apart, it might be more accurately summed up as a hybrid between Bresson's *Diary* and *High Noon* – *Calvary* too climaxes in its solitary hero striding alone to his appointed showdown.

Calvary announces at the start that it will be as much a self-conscious black comedy as *The Guard*. It begins with an unseen man in a confessional, announcing, "I first tasted semen when I was seven years old," to which Brendan Gleeson's priest replies, "Certainly a startling opening line." Later it is remarked that we might expect "third-act revelations". In fact there are no such revelations, except the identity of the eventual killer, which hardly comes as a surprise, and which his victim – the priest – knows all along. More important is the question of how the priest faces his death, and how he achieves the stature of a Christ-like figure resisting the temptation to lose faith.

The film's claim to moral and philosophical substance rests partly on the formidable shoulders of Brendan Gleeson, whose muscularity as an actor makes him more than credible as a man wrestling with the dark forces of human fallibility. Gleeson has played charismatic criminals in his time, notably in John Boorman's *The General* (1998), while his Gerry Boyle in *The Guard* was a seemingly corrupt man who proved an implacable force for justice. Echoes

of Gleeson's Boyle add resonance to *Calvary*, where we perceive Father James (his name only revealed late in the film, in a casual aside) as all the more plausible an embodiment of good because he's knocked about a bit. Father James is, *Calvary* suggests, the best sort of priest, one who has been both *of* the world and *in* it, and who has chosen to reject the secular life from a position of experience: surely a more robust role model for an endangered profession than the etiolated young sufferer of Bresson's film.

James has been married, is a father, and has contended with a drink problem, and while his nemesis sees him as innocent, James is anything but; he understands the struggles of others because he knows the world. In a poignant, beautifully acted dialogue on the beach, his adult daughter (Kelly Reilly) reminds him of his own lapses, notably the fact that, in opting for the cloth, he has left her feeling abandoned.

Meanwhile, the local community aggressively challenges James's faith, just as in Bresson's film. Financier Michael fancies himself a man of culture yet values nothing; at once horrified and perversely proud of what he has become, he taunts James with an act of iconoclasm involving Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. Others try to rattle James in different ways: butcher's wife Veronica spices up her confessions, and her lover Simon is brutally frank about their affair. But James is hardly shocked by sexual transgressions: he is only too happy for local boy Milo to sublimate his potential violence through pornography. And he is the only person to feel compassion for cannibal murderer Freddie. One person who does trouble James, however, is medic Frank; he may joke about his own stereotypical role as "the atheist doctor" but he cuts deep into James's belief by telling a grim anecdote about a child accidentally paralysed in an operation. "Why the fuck would you tell me a story like that?" James reacts furiously, on the night that finally makes him hit the bottle.

What everyone seems to resent is James's ability to face up to the complexity and brutality of the world. How dare he keep faith when the world is all but impossible to reconcile with the idea of a merciful God? Articulating these characters' fury, *Calvary* emerges directly from the current crisis of Irish Catholicism brought about by sexual abuse by priests and its institutional covering-up. The theme is most explicitly displayed when James has a friendly

conversation with a young girl, only for her angry father to intervene, equating cassocks with paedophilia. Meanwhile publican Brendan, threatened with foreclosure, furiously demands to know why the Church doesn't condemn the banks. Nevertheless, *Calvary* ends, à la Bresson, by affirming the possibility of grace: hence a closing prison scene in the manner of *Pickpocket* (1959).

Calvary's main flaw is that it feels a little overstuffed with character eccentricities, notably in the Anthony Perkins twitchiness of the sexually frustrated Milo or rent-boy Leo's relentless Cagney impersonations. But Gleeson's magnificent intensity and the palpable wit and intelligence of the film's conception make *Calvary* an audacious advance on *The Guard*. This is not only a provocatively involving thriller but a true rarity in cinema – a genuinely compelling moral and theological investigation. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Chris Clark
Flora Fernandez
Marengo
James Flynn
Written by
John Michael
McDonagh
**Director of
Photography**
Larry Smith
Editor
Chris Gill
**Production
Designer**
Mark Geraghty
Composer
Patrick Cassidy
**Production
Sound Mixer**
Robert Flanagan
Costume Designer
Eimer Ní
Mhaoldomhnaigh

©Calvary Films
Limited/The British
Film Institute
**Production
Companies**
Bord Scannán na
hÉireann/Irish
Film Board and

BFI present in
association with
LipSync Productions
LLC a Reprisal
Films and Octagon
Films production
Produced with
the support
of investment
incentives for the
Irish Film Industry
provided by the
government
of Ireland
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
**Executive
Producers**
Robert Walak
Ronan Flynn

CAST

Brendan Gleeson
Father James Lavelle
Chris O'Dowd
Jack Brennan
Kelly Reilly
Fiona
Aidan Gillen
doctor
Dylan Moran

Michael Fitzgerald
Isaach de Bankolé
Simon
M. Emmet Walsh
Gerald Ryan
Marie-Josée Croze
Teresa
Domhnall Gleeson
Freddie Joyce
David Wilmot
young priest
Pat Shortt
Lynch
Gary Lydon
Gerry Stanton
Killian Scott
Milo
Orla O'Rourke
Veronica Brennan
Owen Sharpe
Leo
David McSavage
bishop

**Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]**
Distributor
EI Films

9,078 ft +0 frames

County Sligo, the present. In confession, a man reveals that as a child he was abused by a priest, and that he plans to avenge himself by killing a good priest; he tells his confessor Father James that he will kill him the following Sunday. Over the next week, Father James encounters various troubled members of his community, among them Veronica Brennan, promiscuous wife of butcher Jack; her lover, African immigrant Simon; Milo, a sexually frustrated young man; and Michael Fitzgerald, a disillusioned financier. Father James tells his bishop that he knows his prospective killer but won't name him. He visits elderly American novelist Gerald Ryan; Freddie Joyce, a young man imprisoned for cannibalistic murders; and policeman Gerry Stanton and his rent-boy lover Leo. Father James is visited by Fiona, his adult daughter.

Father James faces hostility from his community; his church is burned down and his dog is killed. In the pub, Father James starts drinking and fires a gun that Stanton has given him. James considers going away but changes his mind after a meeting with Teresa, the widow of a tourist killed in an accident. On Sunday, Father James keeps his appointment with his killer; it is Jack, who shoots him dead. Afterwards, Fiona visits Jack in prison.

Captain America The Winter Soldier

USA 2014

Directors: Anthony Russo, Joe Russo

Certificate 12A 135m 42s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Marvel's 'Phase Two' cycle continues efficiently in this companion piece to *Iron Man Three* and *Thor: The Dark World*. Like them, it isolates its hero from the super-group formation revealed in 2012's *Avengers Assemble*, the culmination of Phase One, and instead surrounds him with a mix of carried-over and newly introduced characters and pits him against a large-scale threat explicitly suited to his particular area of expertise. There is now even a profile for a Marvel safe pair (or quartet) of hands, with directors Anthony and Joe Russo following Alan Taylor of the *Thor* sequel in turning out a smart little heist movie (*Welcome to Collinwood*) at the beginning of a career that has mostly been spent (like *Avengers Assemble*'s Joss Whedon) in quality television (*Community*). The assumption seems to be that, with enough tech support, anyone can handle the huge action scenes required of a comic-book-superhero movie these days, but more finesse is required to bring the requisite moments of warmth, humour, character byplay and unironic retro-heroic posturing that generally distinguish the product from po-faced miseries or bungled faux-Marvels such as *Man of Steel* and *Green Lantern*.

It's a strength of the Marvel Universe in comics that it can accommodate Howard the Duck and the Punisher – and even find a way of having Howard the Duck *meet* the Punisher – and thus deliver an astonishingly wide variety of genres within the broad superhero model. Joe Johnston's *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) was a gung-ho war movie with gothic mad science, but this follow-up tries for the hi-tech paranoia of the political-conspiracy/surveillance thrillers Robert Redford made in the 1970s (*All the President's Men*, *Three Days of the Condor*). Whereas in Whedon's film (and the TV series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*) the steel-grey-and-

glass world of S.H.I.E.L.D. and the corridors of power were a hi-tech playroom, here they are threatening. It turns out that the good guys were just a mask for the bad guys all along, and the hero's bionic-armed nemesis is his mind-wiped best friend Bucky (though the bulk of the Bucky/Winter Soldier backstory, the work of writer Ed Brubaker, is left in store for a future sequel). This sets up the film's best scene, in which Jack Kirby's demented 1970s creation Arnim Zola (a robot containing the mind of a Nazi mad scientist whose face is projected on a TV screen in its chest) is reimagined with era-appropriate tech as a roomful of antiquated cabinet computers and a greenscreen Toby Jones sneer.

However, the point of films such as *The Conversation* or *The Parallax View* (both 1974) was that their heroes were normal folk trapped in labyrinthine and ruthless machinations. Here, the struggle is unequal, since the plotters are opposed by characters with extra-normal abilities and the kind of zero-degree cool you get when individual script doctors are brought in to beef up roles for Chris Evans, Scarlett Johansson (who has pretty much carried three of these films and deserves her own gig now) and Samuel L. Jackson. It's enormous nonsense, of course, with spectacular Bourne-on-steroids chases and crashes and fights. But there's no denying that it works, even if it is overlong and yet still can't quite give all the players their due (the villain, in particular, could use a rewrite). It delivers its share of great moments – the tell-tale that warns Captain everyone in an elevator is about to pounce on him, and a wonderfully surreal scene that justifies Jenny Agutter's cameo holdover from *Avengers Assemble*, as her dignified S.H.I.E.L.D. council member suddenly reveals awesome martial-arts moves. **S**



Scarlett Johansson, Chris Evans

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kevin Feige
Screenplay
Christopher Markus
Stephen McFeeley
Based on the
Marvel comic by Joe
Simon, Jack Kirby
**Director of
Photography**
Trent Opaloch
Editor
Jeffrey Ford
Production Designer
Peter Wenham
Music
Henry Jackman
Supervising

Sound Editors
Shannon Mills
Daniel Laurie
Costume Designer
Judianna Makovsky
**Visual Effects
and Animation**
Industrial Light
& Magic
Visual Effects
Scanline VFX
Luma Pictures, Inc.
Trixter
Cantina Creative
Perception
Lola VFX
The Embassy
Whiskytree Inc

Rise Visual Effects
Studios
Logan
Sony Pictures
Imageworks Inc.
Technicolor
Capital T
Stunt Co-ordinator
Thomas Robinson
Harper

©Marvel
**Production
Company**
Marvel Studios
presents
Executive Producers
Victoria Alonso

Michael Grillo
Stan Lee
Alan Fine
Louis D'Esposito

CAST

Chris Evans
Steve Rogers,
'Captain America'
Scarlett Johansson
Natasha Romanoff,
'Black Widow'
Sebastian Stan
Bucky Barnes,
'Winter Soldier'
Anthony Mackie
Sam Wilson, 'Falcon'

Cobie Smulders
Maria Hill
Frank Grillo
Brook Rumlow
Emily VanCamp
Kate, Agent 13
Hayley Atwell
Peggy Carter
Robert Redford
Alexander Pierce
Samuel L. Jackson
Nick Fury
Toby Jones
Dr Arnim Zola
Jenny Agutter
Councilwoman
Hawley

**Dolby Digital/Dolby
Atmos/Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

**Some screenings
presented in 3D**

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

12,213 ft +0 frames

Steve Rogers (aka Captain America), super-soldier of World War II, has been revived in the present day and works for Nick Fury, director of international peacekeeping force S.H.I.E.L.D. Just before he is assassinated by the Winter Soldier, a mysterious hitman, Fury warns Steve not to trust anyone. Steve and Natasha Romanoff (aka the Black Widow) track down Fury's old Nazi enemy Arnim Zola, who is dead but digitised. Speaking from a computer, Zola reveals that HYDRA, the Nazi science division, has hidden inside S.H.I.E.L.D. and is close to achieving its long-term aim

of controlling the world. Alexander Pierce, a top-ranking US politician, is HYDRA's present head, and intends to launch three flying arsenals that will target and destroy those he deems subversives. Fury reveals that he is still alive and deploys Steve, Natasha and Sam Wilson (aka the Falcon) to thwart the launch, using codes that will force Pierce's helicopters to target each other. Steve fights the Winter Soldier, whom he recognises as his brainwashed best friend Bucky Barnes, thought lost in WWII. Pierce is killed and his plan foiled, but Fury and the other agents have to go underground.

Cupcakes

Israel/France 2013
Director: Eytan Fox

Reviewed by Alex Davidson

The Eurovision Song Contest, with its jolly blend of cheesy pop and earnest energy, is so easy to parody that few films or TV programmes have bothered with it. Bar a few references in sitcoms and a West End show (*Eurobeat*), most writers have been content to let its appealing shonkiness speak for itself. In Eytan Fox's latest, however, a group of friends enter UniverSong, a thinly disguised Eurovision, after an impromptu song they've written to cheer up one of their circle, the newly single Anat, is chosen to represent Israel.

Cupcakes is a strange change of tone for Fox, whose previous films have been serious dramas, often focusing on homophobia in contemporary Israel; the gay soldiers in *Yossi & Jagger* (2002) and the Israeli and Palestinian lovers in *The Bubble* (2006) are plagued by tragedy. The character of Ofer in *Cupcakes* has a much easier time of it, and offers more hope for happiness. He is a potentially interesting character – a confident homosexual with a fondness for sequined dresses, conducting an affair with the closeted heir to a family business. He's allowed a sex life and a nude scene – a rarity for cinema sissies. Yet Ofer Shechter portrays him as a permanently smirking cliché, and his vow to stay true to the pared-down emotion of the group's song rings hollow given his insistence on wearing a tuxedo-tutu combo.

The film's biggest failing is in convincing us that these six people would choose to be friends in the first place, let alone commit to singing together in an international contest. The women are tired stereotypes – the jilted wife, the oppressed daughter – and although a strident conservative politician at least shows potential to amuse, she's not given enough screen time to develop her schtick. Occasionally, however, welcome moments of political satire sputter through. A noxious TV exec applauds the group's diversity, before cynically ruining



Yael Bar Zohar, Anat Waxman, Efrat Dor

the lack of an Arab in the mix. And in light of Vladimir Putin's recent homophobic legislation, the depiction of the male Russian contestant as a flaming queen is a welcome nod of subversion.

As an escapist fantasy, the film lacks the joy and enthusiasm necessary to catch the viewer up in its garish world. Too much disbelief must be suspended to imagine that these amateurs would get the chance to represent Israel based on a mobile-phone video. Their song was written by Babydaddy, whose previous work with Scissor Sisters and Kylie Minogue – experts at projecting fun and good times – should have led to a sprightlier number than the bland ditty produced here. The film can't even get camp right, with ill-timed comic sequences and staid would-be celebratory sequences. Israeli Eurovision winner Dana International showed a far smarter grasp of the absurd when singing 'Diva' in four minutes than *Cupcakes* manages in 90. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Marco Cherqui
Lauranne Bourrachot
Yoav Roeh
Producers
Moshe Edery
Leon Edery
Gal Uchovsky
Guy Hameiri
Eitan Abot
Script
Eli Bijaoui
Eytan Fox
Cinematography
Dani Schneor
Editing
Ron Omer
Art Direction
Arad Sawat
Music
Frank Iffman
Sound Recorder
Michael Legum
Costume Design
Dany Bar-Shay
Hacol Dvash

Production Companies
An Abot Hameiri,
United King Films,
Chic Films, Lorette
Productions,
Rabinovich

Foundation,
Keshet, Canal+,
Ciné+production
Produced with the
support of Rabinovich
Foundation for
the Arts – Cinema
Project with the
participation of Leon
Recanati Foundation
Supported by Cultural
Administration,
Israel Ministry of
Culture and Sport,
Israel Film Council

CAST

Dana Ivgy
Dana
Keren Berger
Keren
Yael Bar Zohar
Yael
Efrat Dor
Efrat
Anat Waxman
Anat
Ofer Shechter
Ofer
Lior Ashkenazi
lawyer
Edouard Baer
Edouard

Sarit Vino Elad
the minister
Ofer Hayoun
Zohar
Alon Levi
Asi
Oren Shkedy
Aviv
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Pecadillo
Pictures Ltd
Israeli theatrical title
Bananot

Tel Aviv, the present. Six friends and neighbours – baker Anat, schoolteacher Ofer, blogger Keren, singer-songwriter Efrat, former beauty queen Yael, minister's aide Dana – gather to watch UniverSong, a Eurovision-style show. To cheer up the newly single Anat, they improvise a song, which Ofer films on his cellphone and enters for the following year's contest. When the friends are selected to represent Israel, the women are appalled, though eventually all but Dana – whose father disapproves – decide to go ahead. Ofer, who is gay, is secretly dating Asi, heir to a successful family food company. Disgusted by the guidance of TV executives, who force them to camp up their performance, the friends decide to perform a stripped-down version of the song. Dana, inspired by her Eurovision-winning namesake, rejoins the group. The TV executives withdraw their support and funding. When Asi's parents find out about their son's love life, they offer to fund the group's travel to the contest in France, on condition that the relationship remain secret. Ofer reluctantly agrees. Despite a hugely popular performance, the group come second in the contest, beaten by a more flamboyant Russian act. On their return to Israel, Anat reunites with her former partner, Ofer and Asi celebrate their relationship publicly, and the rest of the group find happiness. They dance in the street to Israel's 1979 Eurovision-winning entry, Milk and Honey's 'Hallelujah'.

Dangerous Acts Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus

USA 2013, Director: Madeleine Sackler

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

That old chestnut about the personal being political reaffirms its validity in this vivid observational documentary following the travails of a close-knit underground theatre group battling to make its voice heard in repressive Belarus, which has been under Alexander Lukashenko's totalitarian regime since 1994. Madeleine Sackler's camera sympathetically captures their defiant performances, in which they scrape the surface of inflated balloons to mimic the sound of soldiers' boots on gravel, or struggle en masse beneath a suffocating covering of translucent plastic sheeting. But for many viewers it is the window the film gives on to the textures of the actors' and directors' everyday lives that will leave the strongest impression. It's clear, for instance, that in Belarus normal rules do not apply, since the unlicensed company cannot legally charge audiences admission, and is so wary of the authorities that it never advertises. Instead, invitations go out by email, followed by details over the phone of a public meeting place, from where their largely youthful audiences are ushered to a secret location.

The film's timeline takes us back to autumn 2010, when forthcoming elections provide hope that Lukashenko will be ousted by pro-democracy candidate Andrei Sannikov, whose supporters include the theatre's co-directors Natalia Kaliada and her partner Nicolai Khalezin. We're placed in the thick of it on election night, when Lukashenko's disputed landslide victory is announced and the populace flood Minsk's main square: riot police violently break up the crowds and stop Sannikov addressing them. We see this baton-wielding footage



Stage fright: Oleg Sidorchik

twice, early on as a sort of attention-grabber intercut with the group's performance, and even more effectively later when viewed within dramatic unfolding events. Stakes are so high that the next thing we see is Natalia and Nicolai heading into exile, parted from family because their continuing presence in Belarus is simply unthinkable, such is the fear of imprisonment, torture or 'enforced disappearance'.

The end credits inform us that this and all the other footage shot in Belarus had to be smuggled out of the country, and while the rest of the film chronicles with equally impressive assiduousness the struggle for Natalia, Nicolai and their actors to regroup in New York and London, winning prestigious theatre awards along the way, it's the telling insinuations in the everyday Minsk-shot domestic scenes which convey the awful reality of daily existence under 'Europe's last dictator'. Actress Yana, for instance, is appalled to learn that her primary-age daughter has joined her classmates in the Pioneers (think Hitler Youth rather than Baden Powell), while Natalia recalls the moment when her daughter spotted a portrait of Lukashenko on a bookshop wall and asked, "Why is there a picture of the man who killed our friend?" Sackler's film certainly doesn't sugarcoat the difficult prospects for Natalia and Nicolai in particular, but it brings admirable empathy and dedication to its expert job of reportage, and we're all the richer for it. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Madeleine Sackler	Steve Borne	Pictures Executive Producer Andrea Meditch
Directors of Photography Daniel Carter Larissa Kabernik	@[none given]	
Edited by Anne Barliant Leigh Johnson	Production Companies HBO Documentary Films presents a Great Curve Films production	In Colour [1.85:1] Subtitles
Original Score Wendy Blackstone	In association with Back Allie Entertainment, Chicken & Egg	Distributor Dogwoof
Supervising Sound Editor		

A documentary following the Belarus Free Theatre, which since 2005 has mounted semi-clandestine performances speaking out against the repressive rule of President Lukashenko, in power since 1994. The elections of December 2010 see the group's co-founders, Natalia Kaliada and Nicolai Khalezin, assisting the campaign of pro-democracy candidate Andrei Sannikov. When Lukashenko claims victory with a disputed 79 per cent of the vote, thousands of protesters gather in Minsk's main square, prompting riot police to break up the crowds. In the aftermath it becomes too dangerous for the Belarus Free Theatre company to remain in the country; the directors and actors are smuggled out and they regroup in New York, where they win an off-Broadway Obie award for 'Being Harold Pinter'. Despite the acclaim, actresses Maryna and Yana return to Belarus to be with their families, though for Natalia and Nicolai it's too dangerous to go back. Instead they relocate to the UK with their daughter Daniella and lead actor Oleg, and stage new works at the Edinburgh Fringe and in London. After the jailing of Sannikov and other former presidential candidates, more pro-democracy protests are violently quashed by Lukashenko. Natalia, Nicolai and Oleg are granted political asylum in the UK, and reunite the Belarus Free Theatre for international touring projects. There is, however, no prospect of them going home while Lukashenko remains in power.

Divergent

USA 2014
Director: Neil Burger
Certificate 12A 139m 29s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

For a film whose title promises deviation from the norm, *Divergent* is pretty standard stuff: they could have called it *Median*. In an overgrown, hollowed-out future version of Chicago – seemingly the only city left standing after a ruinous but unelucidated global conflict – the citizenry has been divided into five specialised factions, each of which contributes in its own way to maintaining a fragile peace. Despite the vague exposition, it's all very familiar: the greyed-out colour scheme; the uniformly fit and nubile (and multicultural) populace; the contraction-free sentences. Substitute the word 'districts' for 'factions', throw in a mockingjay and you'd think you were watching *The Hunger Games*.

This is, of course, exactly what the producers of *Divergent* would like you to think, and so they've constructed their adaptation of Veronica Roth's young-adult bestseller in the style of the other, more world-famous franchise. This similarity extends to the casting of Shailene Woodley as Katniss-manquée Tris, who is born a member of the 'Abnegation' faction (the moniker is not a metaphor – their job is apparently to be self-effacing while remaining in charge) but opts for the roughneck life of the 'Dauntless' on 'Choosing Day', in effect trading civil service for army recruitment. It is the job of the Dauntless to protect the Windy City from the threats lurking beyond its walls, and their commanding officers take this task so seriously that their training process sometimes proves fatal for new initiates.

Director Neil Burger wisely doesn't give us time to ruminate on a post-apocalyptic civilisation that can't afford overhead lighting in its buildings but takes time out for elaborate rituals to determine the professional designations of its teenage members; nobody in *Divergent* ever seems to question the social order, such as it is, and so neither should we. Predictably, Tris turns out to be that one-in-a-million girl whose skill/mindset transcends the requisite pigeonholing – making her the ideal heroine for a multimedia series trying to attract high-school-aged readers and viewers. Because she's 'divergent', she doesn't



Public sectors: Shailene Woodley, Theo James

fit in and is an outcast; at the same time, this stigma (which has to remain hidden from the 'Erudite' overseers who prize intelligence over compassion) makes her Very Special indeed.

As long as it's in its middle boot-camp section in the subterranean Dauntless compound – which suggests nothing so much as a PG-13 replay of *Starship Troopers*, group tattoos, co-ed showers and all – *Divergent* is entertaining enough. Tris's neo-G.I. Jane transformation is complemented by bizarre mental exercises that find her learning how to master fear, and Burger shows skill for the hallucinatory imagery of her drug-fuelled waking nightmares. But the gears of the plot grind so loudly and heavily that it's hard to tune them out and focus on the character development.

Already slowed down by its weight as a wannabe tent-pole brand name, *Divergent* completely topples over in the home stretch, despite the best efforts of Kate Winslet as a slinky corporate villainess whose practised condescension is a nice counterpoint to Woodley's character. Like Jennifer Lawrence before her, Woodley has mastered the contradictory art of having a commanding underdog presence, and she carries this 140-minute movie on her slender but sturdy shoulders without buckling. *Divergent* doesn't have much force as an allegory about the ideology of inequality but it does make a good case for its star's inevitable movement to the top of the Hollywood pecking order. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Douglas Wick Lucy Fisher Pouya Shahbazian	©Summit Entertainment, LLC	Miles Teller Peter Tony Goldwyn Andrew Prior
Screenplay Evan Daugherty Vanessa Taylor Based on the novel by Veronica Roth	Production Companies Summit Entertainment presents a Red Wagon Entertainment production	Ansel Elgort Caleb Maggie Q Tori
Director of Photography Alwin Küchler	A Neil Burger film	Mekhi Phifer Max
Editors Richard Francis-Bruce Nancy Richardson	Executive Producers John J. Kelly Rachel Shane	Kate Winslet Jeanine Matthews
Production Designer Andy Nicholson	CAST	Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]
Music Junkie XL	Shailene Woodley Beatrice Prior, 'Tris'	Distributor El Films
Supervising Sound Editors Wylie Stateman Harry Cohen	Theo James Tobias Eaton, 'Four'	12,553 ft +8 frames
Costume Designer Carlo Poggioni	Ashley Judd Natalie Prior	
Stunt Co-ordinator Garrett Warren	Jai Courtney Eric	
	Ray Stevenson Marcus Eaton	
	Zoe Kravitz Christina	

Chicago, the future. Following a world war, society has been divided into five factions: Abnegation, Amity, Candour, Dauntless and Erudite. When citizens turn 16, they take an aptitude test that will determine their affiliation. Despite being born into an Abnegation household, Beatrice Prior has a strange test result, which places her in three categories at once. On Choosing Day, she selects Dauntless, a militaristic sect whose members are charged with protecting the populace from outside threats. During her training, Beatrice – who has changed her name to Tris – struggles with physical combat but distinguishes herself with her bravery and selfless attitude. Her instructor Four realizes that she is 'Divergent', and tells her she must hide her specialness from the members of Erudite, who are trying to eradicate outliers. Tris and Four discover that Erudite is behind a plot to inject the members of Dauntless with a mind-control serum and use them to seize power. After a series of setbacks, they manage to thwart the coup but not before Tris's parents die in the crossfire. Tris and Four head out of the city to see what lies beyond its walls.

An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker

Bosnia and Herzegovina/France/Republic of Slovenia/Italy 2012
Director: Danis Tanovic

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Former war cameraman and documentarist Danis Tanovic made a huge international splash with his debut feature *No Man's Land* in 2001. When it beat Jean-Pierre Jeunet's much fancied *Amélie* to a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, it gave Bosnia's nascent movie industry a huge morale boost – not least because it was so angrily uncompromising in its denunciation of the ineffectiveness of organisations (in this case the so-called UN 'peacekeepers') charged with protecting the vulnerable. Although it's stylistically and tonally very different, and conceived on a much smaller scale, Tanovic returns to similar territory with his fifth feature, inspired by a news article and shot in nine days on digital video for just €17,000. Instead of a fully developed screenplay, Tanovic decided to restage the article's actual events in the same locations, with as many of the real-life participants as possible playing themselves – including the four-strong family at its centre.

The result could superficially be described as a Bosnian *Cathy Come Home*, although the treatment is generally much more restrained. The closest thing to emotional grandstanding comes when protagonist Nazif Mujic complains that despite his four years' service fighting for his country in the 1990s (his brother was killed during the Bosnian conflict), he's been left with no means of state-backed financial support – but this is more a rueful acknowledgement of his experience than a consciously manipulative attempt at tugging heartstrings. For British viewers, if the central situation (the inability to secure even emergency surgery thanks to a lack of medical insurance) is technically impossible within the National Health Service, the film offers a sobering reminder of what life might be like without it for those on the margins of society (the Mujics are from Bosnia's Roma community).

Nazif is an 'iron picker' – he scavenges derelict ground for pieces of metal that he can sell for scrap. Much of the early part of the film is devoted to him going about his business – at one point he has to rip an abandoned car to transportable shreds with the help of his neighbour Refke, and he often has to dig through snow. The film's leisurely opening scenes could almost be a fly-on-the-wall documentary about the Mujics' day-to-day lives: Nazif chops wood and scavenges scrap, his wife Senada prepares a burek (a kind of stuffed spiral pastry – we're shown several stages of its creation) and washes clothes in the bath, while the kids amuse themselves by watching television and swinging on doors.

It's a deeply precarious lifestyle. When Senada says "God willing, you'll get more tomorrow" on seeing a day's meagre takings, she's almost certainly enacting a daily ritual, and it's clear – even before she starts to feel a severe abdominal pain – that just one tiny mishap could overturn everything. This duly happens when the horrified couple discover that free emergency healthcare only stretches as far as diagnosing a miscarriage and writing a referral to a specialist clinic to have the dead foetus removed – but the actual operation needs to be paid for upfront to the tune of 980 marks (over £400), with no instalment plan on offer. Appeals fall on deaf ears and visits to two charities prove equally fruitless, with the result



Mettle detector: Nazif Mujic, Senada Alimanovic, Sandra Mujic

that Nazif is forced to turn to fraud to prevent Senada's near-certain death from septicaemia.

Unlike *No Man's Land*, with its unambiguous villain in the form of Simon Callow's pompous, complacent UN colonel and its outspoken heroine in Katrin Cartlidge's crusading reporter, *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker* doesn't point the finger at individuals – indeed, Tanovic makes it clear that the hospital staff are prepared to be as helpful as possible within the constraints under which they're forced to work, and the Mujics' immediate neighbours and further-flung relatives are models of mutual support. It's the wider, faceless bureaucracy of a social system that

only embraces those who are able to subscribe to it financially that's Tanovic's real target, and if the film fails to draw any particularly pointed conclusions (although it could be described as a dramatised documentary, it lacks the form's usual editorialising and context-setting), the same was true of *No Man's Land* – and the director's underlying anger is just as palpable. Although the film is dramatically engrossing enough on its own terms, it also doubles as effective propaganda for Nasa Stranka ('Our Party'), the political party that Tanovic co-founded in 2008, whose main platform is the securing of equal rights for all Bosnians regardless of income or ethnic origin. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Amra Baksic Camo
Cedomir Kolar
Written by
Danis Tanovic
Director of Photography
Erol Zubcevic
Editor
Timur Makarevic

Sound Design/Mix
Samir Foco

@SCCA/pro.ba,
A.S.A.P. Films,
Vertigo/Emotionfilm
Production Companies
SCCA/pro.ba in
co-production

with A.S.A.P. Films,
Vertigo/Emotionfilm
Supported by
Fondacija za
Kinematografiju,
Sarajevo, Rai Cinema
Executive Producers
Adnan Besirovic
Adis Dapo

CAST
Senada Alimanovic
Senada
Nazif Mujic
Nazif
Sandra Mujic
Sandra
Semsa Mujic
Semsa

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

Bosnian
theatrical title
**Epizoda u životu
beraca željeza**

Poljice, rural Bosnia, the present. Nazif Mujic lives with his pregnant wife Senada and young daughters Semsa and Sandra and works as an 'iron picker', obtaining metal from rubbish dumps and selling it to scrap dealers for a pittance. When Senada develops severe abdominal pain, Nazif rushes her to hospital, to be told that she's suffered a miscarriage and the dead foetus needs to be removed urgently to avoid septicaemia. After a lengthy drive to the recommended clinic they are told they have to pay 980 marks upfront because they are uninsured. Back home, Senada's pain worsens, and they return to the hospital but are again rebuffed. Nazif's car fails, so he takes the bus to a charity organisation,

which fruitlessly rings social services on Senada's behalf. Representatives of another charity insist the hospital must operate regardless, but Senada refuses to go without a guarantee that the bill will be paid. Finally, Nazif borrows his sister-in-law's insurance papers and a neighbour's car and drives Senada to a different hospital, claiming that he forgot to collect her identity card in the rush. The hospital successfully operates, advising Nazif that Senada was hours away from possibly fatal complications. Returning home, they find that the electricity has been cut off. Neighbours Kasim and Refke help Nazif take apart his own car to sell for scrap to settle outstanding bills. The electricity is reconnected.

Escape from Planet Earth

USA/Canada 2013
Director: Cal Brunker
Certificate U 84m 22s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Retro-pulp science-fiction imagery has been overused in broad CGI animated kids' movies with a general sliding scale of quality, from the inspired *Monsters vs Aliens* (2009) through to the dreary *Mars Needs Moms* (2011).

This offers yet another take, which is almost a mirror image of 2009's *Planet 51*: there, an Earth astronaut, paranoid because of the mythology of alien invasions and abductions, lands on a peaceful 1950s-style planet; here, good-guy aliens who mean no harm are mistreated by a standardised xenophobic martinet (voiced by William Shatner) set on making sure that humanity is alone in the universe.

The upfront story of the braggart dumb-hero brother and the mistreated smart-planner brother who learn to appreciate one another is tiresome and hectoring, and Kip, the son who despises his clever father Gary but idolises his stupid uncle Scorch, is just annoying. There's also a noxious subtext in that the alien villainess in league with Shatner's character is an unhappy career woman so love-starved that she'll betray the universe to get a boyfriend, while the heroine is Gary's wife, who has given up her job as a rocket-boot test pilot to become a stay-at-home mom. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Catherine Winder
Luke Carroll
Brian Inerfeld

Written by
Bob Barlen
Cal Brunker

Additional Writing
Stephen Fry
Dan Mazer

Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein

Director of Photography
Matthew A. Ward

Edited by
Matthew London
Scott Winlaw

Production Design
Barry Jackson

Music
Aaron Zigman

Supervising Sound Editor
Dave Paterson

Animation Director
Adam Wood

©Escape Films
TWC LLC

Production Companies
The Weinstein Company/
Kaleidoscope TWC

in association with
GRF Productions
present a Rainmaker
Entertainment film

With the
participation of The
Province of British
Columbia, The
Canadian Film or
Video Production
Services Tax Credit

Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein

Director of Photography
Radenko Milakovic
Marvin Pearl
Tony Leech

Edited by
Matthew London
Scott Winlaw

Production Design
Barry Jackson

Music
Aaron Zigman

Supervising Sound Editor
Dave Paterson

Animation Director
Adam Wood

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TWC LLC

Production Companies
The Weinstein Company/
Kaleidoscope TWC

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Production Companies
The Weinstein Company/
Kaleidoscope TWC

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Jonathan Morgan Heit
Kip Supernova

Paul Scheer
cameraman

Jayson Simpson
Barry

Dolby Digital/ Datasat
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Entertainment
Film Distributors

7,593 ft +0 frames

VOICE CAST

Rob Corddry
Gary Supernova

Brendan Fraser
Scorch Supernova

Sarah Jessica Parker
Kira Supernova

William Shatner
General Shanker

Jessica Alba
Lena Thacklemann

Jane Lynch
Jo

Ricky Gervais
Mr James Bing

Scorch Supernova, an arrogant astronaut from Planet Baab, quarrels with his brother Gary, a mission controller, and Gary quits. Scorch is sent by his superior Lena Thacklemann to answer a rescue call from 'the Dark Planet' – Earth. Lena is in league with bigoted American general Shanker, who has been abducting aliens and using their technology to create a weapon that will enable him to wipe out all extraterrestrial life. Scorch is captured by Shanker, having unwittingly smuggled the power source for the weapon. Gary sets out to rescue him; with the help of other captured aliens in Area 52, the Supernovas defeat Shanker.

The Informant

France/Canada/Belgium 2013
Director: Julien Leclercq

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Not to be confused with either Steven Soderbergh's *The Informant!* (2009) or Jim McBride's 1997 IRA drama of the same name, *The Informant* is the nondescript English title for French director Julien Leclercq's more atmospherically named *Gibraltar*. The English directly translates the name of Marc Fiévet's autobiographical book *L'Aviseur*, on which the film is based, but *Gibraltar* suggests something more atmospheric, more steeped in a specific spirit of place than this run-of-the-mill thriller, which uses the political and geographical peculiarity of the Rock purely as a springboard for a dour drama of exploitation and betrayal between cops and *contrebandiers*.

The film starts with the caption "Based on a true story", followed by a panoply of would-be urgent visuals – close-ups of maps, thumbprints, banknotes, a typewriter banging out significant phrases. This establishes a literal, heavy-handed tone for a film that makes little interesting use of the criminal 'interzone' we're given to understand Gibraltar is, or was in the 80s. It's understood here that the French customs service, while hardly stainless, is the only party with sufficient executive efficacy to control the flow of narcotics through the port – given that their Spanish and British counterparts are said to turn a blind eye to criminal traffic.

The force and realism of the drama depend on Gibraltar itself having a plausible status as a no man's land or a criminal Babel – something like the Algiers of *Pépé le Moko* (1937) or the Tex-Mex border towns of many a contemporary neo-western thriller. But this dimension is undermined by the film's general lack of interest in Gibraltar as a place or a culture; Leclercq



Tahar Rahim, Gilles Lellouche

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Claude Léger

Screenplay
Abdel Raouf Dafri

Based on the
book *Gibraltar*
by Marc Fiévet

Director of Photography
Thierry Pouget

Editors
Mickael Dumontier
Arthur Tarnowski

Art Director
Jean-Philippe
Moreaux

Original Music
Clinton Shorter

Sound Recordist

Claude Lahaye
Costume Designer
Odette Gadoury

©Chapter 2, Transfilm
International Inc.,
Orange Studio, SND,
M6 Films, Jouror

Distribution, Savon
Noir, Nexus Factory

Production Companies
A Chapter 2, Transfilm
International Inc.,
Les Films L'Aviseur

Inc., Orange Studio,
SND, M6 Films, Jouror

Distribution, Savon
Noir, Nexus Factory

In co-production
with uFilm and

co-production
With the participation
of Canadian Film or
Video Production
Tax Credit Program,
SODEC Québec,
Téléfilm Canada

With the support of
Prociop and Angoa-
Agicoa, Tax Shelter
du Gouvernement
Fédéral de Belgique

With the participation
of Centre National du
Cinéma et de l'Image
Animée, Canal+,
Ciné+, M6, W9

In co-production
with uFilm and

in association
with uFund

Executive Producer
Marc Vade

Film Extracts
*Berberian Sound
Studio* (2011)

makes very average visual use of the territory, while the bar run by central protagonist Duval has neither solidity as a purely functional venue for the intrigue nor any atmospheric quality as a criminal hangout (Rick's Café it ain't).

The film's cosmopolitanism comes across as entirely bogus. There's a phoney Bond-villain exoticism to playboy gangster Lanfredi, played by Riccardo Scamarcio, while Gaspar Noé favourite Philippe Nahon, a walking signifier of weathered French low-lifery, is introduced briefly at the outset to kick-start the intrigue. British customs officers Nichols and Carlyle are played by Norwegian and Canadian actors respectively, to distracting effect.

The film has three moderate commercial cards to play. One is the script credit for Abdel Raouf Dafri (best known for the *Mesrine* diptych and as one of the writers on Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet*); he turns in a no-frills, potentially intriguing piece, although the accumulation of double-crosses soon gets cluttered. Then there are the presences of rising star Tahar Rahim (*A Prophet*, *The Past*) and, in the lead, Gilles Lellouche. Rahim looks detached and quietly uncomfortable in a low-key role as a routinely corrupt authority figure, while Lellouche plays Duval as a rugged but sullen loser, starting as a careworn family man trying to do right but increasingly seeming like a naive blunderer out of his depth. The character remains forlornly opaque, whether scowling on his boat or beating up his sister's abusive boyfriend in a sequence edited with a rare touch of Hong Kong kineticism.

The women in the story, Duval's wife and sister, barely emerge as characters but are present largely to give him something to fret over. Drab, depthless interiors and an excess of beige in the palette gesture at hard-boiled matter-of-factness but contribute to the general leadenness of this overcomplicated true-crime anecdote. **S**

Tahar Rahim
Redjani Belimane

Aidan Devine
Bobby Sims

Vlasta Vrana
Inspector Nichols

Joe Cobden
Agent Carlyle

Philippe Nahon
Glacose

Jean-Philippe Puymartin
Jean-Henri Gallois

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Gilles Lellouche
Marc Duval

Riccardo Scamarcio
Mario/Claudio

Pasco Lanfredi
Raphaëlle Agogué
Clara Duval

Mélanie Bernier
Cécile Duval

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film
Distribution

French theatrical title
Gibraltar

gives Duval a job delivering cocaine to the IRA; Sims later shoots Wexford. Duval begins working for Wexford's associate Claudio Lanfredi, who embarks on an affair with Duval's sister Cécile. Duval is given responsibility for a ship carrying drugs to Canada but the vessel is apprehended and he is arrested trying to leave Gibraltar; he is subsequently tried for trafficking and imprisoned in Canada. Duval's wife Clara uses his tapes to get him released but he spends another ten years in prison in France.

The Invisible War

USA/United Kingdom/France 2011
Director: Kirby Dick

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

In 1991 it was calculated that around 200,000 women had been sexually assaulted while serving in the US army, a figure that has probably doubled by now. It's only an approximate figure, of course, since it's estimated that over 80 per cent of victims never report their rapist nor the assault, owing to potential repercussions – professional retaliation, stigmatisation or the fact that in many cases the perpetrator is a friend, colleague or indeed the very person to whom the case would have to be reported.

These alarming figures, published in an article by a Columbia University professor at Salon.com, prompted veteran documentarian Kirby Dick and producer Amy Ziering to make *The Invisible War*; surprisingly, this subject has never before been touched on in a film. Focusing almost exclusively on the women affected (and one man), the film is structured around interviews, conducted by Ziering, with some of the 16 victims whose testimonies were put together in a lawsuit against the US army in 2011. These are intercut with official statements – from army personnel, politicians and representatives of various governmental organisations – and glimpses of the harrowing effects the assaults have had on the daily lives of the victims, depression being the most prevalent.

Kirby Dick's often colourful and formally adventurous documentaries have explored an eclectic range of subject matter, from French philosopher Jacques Derrida (*Derrida*, 2002) and abuse within the Catholic Church (*Twist of Faith*, 2004) to the randomness of MPAA ratings (*This Film Is Not Yet Rated*, 2006). In *The Invisible War* he keeps his style sober and reined-in, letting his subjects and the distressing



Breaking ranks: *The Invisible War*

figures speak for themselves. The result is a stark, often shocking and moving film.

The first thing that becomes apparent is the extent to which the experiences of pretty much all the victims uncannily echo each other. Drugged, threatened at gunpoint, they were often so violently attacked that in some cases they were not only psychologically but also physically handicapped for life. Such is the case with Kori Cioca, an ex-Coast Guard whose face was slammed so forcefully as she tried to prevent her superior assaulting her that the damage to her jaw has left her on a liquid diet. Or Hannah Sewell of the US navy, who was raped with such force that her hips were rotated.

Department of Defense figures reveal that 20 per cent of female military personnel experience rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment while on service, causing a higher rate of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) among the victims than their male colleagues experience as a result of combat. And yet, despite all the untold damage, the facts are covered up by a fraternity of sorts (not dissimilar to the way sex scandals have been concealed in the Catholic Church), meaning that almost all the perpetrators go unchallenged, and in some cases the victims are even prosecuted.

The Invisible War's most shocking dimension is the way the military reveals itself as a microcosm of wider society's attitudes towards sexual assault, since many of the victims are not only ostracised but charged with adultery if their rapist is married, or public misconduct if forced to get drunk, or accused of dressing too 'provocatively' (despite being in uniform) by the very institution to which they have dedicated their lives. Many are the daughters or wives of other army personnel, whose struggle with the events is also profiled in the documentary.

Although perpetrators are inevitably unheard in the film, *The Invisible War* does strive for an objective stance on the subject, steering away from total condemnation of the US army, instead presenting the issue as a fundamentally systemic problem. Despite that, certain elements linger after the closing credits, such as the advertising campaign undertaken by the US army in 2011, supposedly in order to prevent rapes occurring, which included a poster that read: "Don't risk it. Wait until she's sober." And the lawsuit presented on behalf of the 16 victims was dismissed on the grounds that rape was an occupational hazard of being in the US army. ☹

Ironclad 2 Battle for Blood

Director: Jonathan English
Certificate 15 108m 7s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Jonathan English's sequel to his 2011 feature *Ironclad* is sabotaged by tin-eared dialogue and a crudely repetitive screenplay. Its extremely bloody action sequences are filmed in fluid and energetic fashion – it's the plot that creaks and lists. The action takes place in 1221, a few years after the Battle of Rochester Castle (featured in the original *Ironclad* film) and, for reasons that are never made entirely clear, a marauding bunch of Celts (many of them with blue paint on their faces and looking like the Tartan Army en route to Wembley) are laying siege to a remote stronghold.

The filmmakers use jerky, handheld camera, rapid editing and natural light to give an immediacy to the many scenes of the Celts trying to break into the castle of nobleman Gilbert de Vespi (David Rintoul). The bloodletting – decapitations, amputations, impalings, eyeball gougings – is done with plenty of relish, and the VFX don't expose what must have been a limited budget. However, what is being fought over remains largely a mystery. In an early scene reminiscent of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the kindly Gilbert offers mercy to the son of Celtic raider Maddog, but has his arm lopped off for his trouble. ("Mercy is for pigs!" he is told.) The son, though, is killed, and Maddog (played by Serbian actor Predrag Bjelac with a Scottish accent) vows vengeance, muttering darkly about the treachery and cruelty of the English.

It is at this point that the film enters *Groundhog Day* mode. The Celts attack the castle, the English repel them, the Celts attack again, the English repel them – and so it goes on. Gilbert sends his son Hubert (the English characters all have names with a hint of P.G. Wodehouse about them) to recruit help. This turns up in the form of Guy (Tom Austen); his friend Berenger (David Caves); an executioner called, almost inevitably, Pierrepoint (Andy Beckwith); and Mary, an ultraviolent sorceress (Twinnie-Lee Moore). Confusingly, Guy seems to be not only a hired hand but also closely related to the besieged family. He is smitten by his beautiful young cousin Kate (Rosie Day).



Knight shift: Tom Austen

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Amy Ziering
Tanner King Barklow

Written by

Kirby Dick

Cinematography

Thaddeus Wadleigh
Kirsten Johnson

Editors

Doug Blush
Derek Boonstra

Design/Animation

Bil White

Production Sound

Tom Casetta

Aaron Delgrosso

Marianna LaFollette

Bob Silverthorne

©Chain Camera

Pictures, Inc.

Production

Companies

Chain Camera

Pictures and Regina

Kulik Scully and

Jennifer Siebel

Newsom present

in association with

RISE Films and ITVS.

Fork Films, Cuomo

Cole Productions,

Canal Plus a film

by Kirby Dick &

Amy Ziering

A co-production

of Chain Camera

Pictures, Inc. and

Independent

Television Service

(ITVS), with

funding provided

by Corporation for

Public Broadcasting

(CPB)

Produced in

association with

CBC News Network

Supported by the

Sundance Institute

Documentary

Film Program, The

Fledgling Fund, and

Funding Exchange.

Executive

Producers

Regina Kulik Scully

Jennifer Siebel

Newsom

Geralyn White

Dreyfous

Abigail Disney

Maria Cuomo Cole

Sarah Johnson

Redlich

Women Donors

Network

Teddy Leifer

Nicole Boxer-Keegan

Sally Jo Fifer

In Colour

[L78:1]

Distributor

Independent

Distribution

A documentary about the increasing number of rape cases in the US army. The film consists of interviews with some of the 16 victims whose testimonies were assembled in a lawsuit against the US army in 2011, intercut with statements by army officials and politicians. Although some policies have been modified, the court dismisses the victims' lawsuit, ruling that rape is an occupational hazard of military service. The victims are currently appealing against the decision.

➔ We're given little sense of how long the siege has lasted. Judging by the changing seasons and the fact that Hubert has time to ride off cross-country in search of reinforcements, it must be weeks or even months, though provisions never seem to run out. The Celts try ladders; they climb up through the castle's sewage system; they catapult the walls with huge stones; finally, they turn to fire. The moments between raids are excruciating. Mary seduces Hubert. Maddog sits by his fire in the woods, muttering about the duplicity of the English. Gilbert grows ever weaker. Guy looks moody. The dialogue is arch and anachronistic.

The first *Ironclad* was set around the time of Magna Carta and paid at least token attention to the politics and history of medieval England. This lumbering sequel has no such interests. It is essentially a series of battle scenes strung together with minimal characterisation. Its ending makes little sense. A voiceover refers to the hero going on to fight in the Hundred Years War, which raises the prospect of yet another sequel but can't help but seem absurd. How did they know in advance that it would be called the Hundred Years War? And given that we're in the 13th century and the Hundred Years War didn't start until well into the 14th, doesn't that mean the hero will be long since dead? These are questions that the filmmakers don't deign to answer. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rick Benattar
Andrew Curtis
Jonathan English
Written by
Steven McDool
Jonathan English
Director of Photography
Zoran Popovic
Editor
Laurens Van Charante
Production Designer
Jelena Sopic
Music
Composed by
Andreas Weidinger
Production Sound Mixer
Zoran Maksimovic
Costume Designer
Tatjana Strugar
Stunt Coordinator/Fight Choreographer
Slavisa Ivanic

Production Companies
Content Media Corporation in association with Matador Pictures presents a Mythic International Entertainment production
Executive Producers
Jamie Carmichael
Nigel Thomas

CAST

Tom Austen
Guy de Lusignan
Tom Rhys Harries
Hubert de Vesci
Roxanne McKee
Blanche de Vesci
Danny Webb
Mr Smith
Rosie Day
Kate de Vesci
David Caves

Berenger
Andy Beckwith
Pierrepoint
Twinnee-Lee Moore
Crazy Mary
Predrag Bjelac
Maddog
Michelle Fairley
Joan de Vesci
David Rintoul
Gilbert de Vesci

In Colour

Distributor
Warner Brothers Entertainment UK Ltd

9,730ft +8 frames

England, the 13th century. Nobleman Gilbert de Vesci lives with his family and followers in a remote castle that comes under siege from Celtic tribesmen. The raiders are led by Maddog, who has a psychopathic hatred of the English. When Maddog's son is killed, the Celtic leader vows vengeance. Gilbert is badly wounded; he sends his son Hubert to recruit a band of mercenaries to help hold the castle. The mercenaries are led by Guy, Gilbert's nephew, still racked with guilt over his experiences in the Battle of Rochester Castle a few years earlier. Gilbert dies. After repeated attacks, the Celts gain access to the castle and Hubert is captured. Guy hides out in the keep with Gilbert's daughters. He challenges Maddog to single combat. They fight. Maddog is killed and the siege ends.

Khumba

Republic of South Africa/USA 2013
Director: Anthony Silverston
Certificate U 84m 58s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

A bereaved, troubled young man sets off on a journey to find himself. It's the stuff of many a great novel, and many a teen movie too. This 3D family animation steers closer to the latter in tone: young zebras share the colloquial American chatter of jocks and cheerleaders, while Khumba, a half-striped zebra, just wants to fit in.

There's a firm message about racial tolerance and integration in both the narrative and the mix of accents. Made in South Africa, the film uses local voice actors along with American and British stars, including Richard E. Grant as flamboyant ostrich Bradley (sometimes amusing) and Catherine Tate as loony sheep Nora (funnier).

Comedy seems to be the chief concern of debut director Anthony Silverston and his team of co-writers. Attempts to explain the mythological beliefs of various tribes are muddled and periodically interrupted by new characters, who are thrown into Khumba's path with theatrical precision. At worst, *Khumba* feels like a series of creaky derivative sketches. At best, it's a well-made animation that fully exploits the appeal of big-eyed little creatures with squeaky voices. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Stuart Forrest
Mike Buckland
Anthony Silverston
James Middleton
Jean-Michael Koenig
Written by
Anthony Silverston
Raffaella Delle Donne
Editing by
Luke Mackay
Production Design
Daniel Clarke
Music
Bruce Retief
Sound Design
Adrian Rhodes
Animation Director
Quentin Vogel

@Khumba Film (Pty) Ltd
Production Companies
Cinema Management Group presents in association with Spier Films, The Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa, The National Film and Video Foundation of South Africa, The Department of Trade and Industry, South Africa a Triggerfish

Animation Studios film Produced in association with Spier Films, The National Film and Video Foundation of South Africa, The Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa Limited, The Department of Trade and Industry, South Africa
Executive Producers
Geoffrey Qhena
Basil Ford
Kofi Amparabeng
Michael Auret
Edward Noeltner

VOICE CAST

Jake T. Austin
Khumba
Steve Buscemi
Skalk
Loretta Devine
Mama V
Laurence Fishburne
Seko
Richard E. Grant
Bradley
AnnaSophia Robb
Tombi
Catherine Tate

Nora
Liam Neeson
Phango

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film Distribution

76,47ft +0 frames

UK publicity title
Khumba A Zebra's Tale

The Last Days on Mars

United Kingdom/Ireland 2013
Director: Ruairi Robinson
Certificate 15 98m 25s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Martian bacteria transform astronauts into zombies (in all but name) in *The Last Days on Mars*, whose primary influences are many-times-picked-over genre touchstones. The escalating paranoia and mutual mistrust are heavily indebted to John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), while many of the film's shots are desultory copies of *Alien* (1979). There are opening slow crawls through a Mars bunker housing a six-month research expedition's crew, and a climax in which a monstrous baddie is sucked into the vacuum of space as the hero clings tightly to a spaceship's interior. At least the allegorical focus is fresh: one crew member speculates that existing as a human vehicle for a rampaging monster must be like being "trapped inside [your] own body without any control". Terminal illness, Alzheimer's, euthanasia, the right to die: the narrative can metaphorically accommodate these or any related concerns.

Jordan proves an adequate stand-in for the red planet but the formulaically humourless scenario is predictable and powered nearly exclusively by stale clichés, with every "You're gonna be OK" inevitably signalling another attack or threat. During big fights, flashing emergency lights conceal poorly choreographed mayhem on cheap sets rather than lend stroboscopic intensity. The solid cast – morose Liev Schreiber, ceaselessly fuming Olivia Williams, twitchy Elias Koteas — swear copiously but generate little energy in this surprisingly enervating effort. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael Kuhn
Andrea Cornwell
Screenplay
Clive Dawson
Based on the short story *The Animators* by Sydney J. Bounds
Director of Photography
Robbie Ryan
Editor
Peter Lambert
Production Designer
Jon Henson
Music
Max Richter
Sound Recordist
Andy Shelley
Costume Designer
Richard Sale
Visual Effects
Screen Scene VFX
Floodland Pictures VFX

@Qwerty Mars Movie Limited and The British Film Institute
Production Companies
BFI in association with Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The

Irish Film Board, Prescience, Altus Productions and Focus Features International present a Qwerty film in co-production with Fantastic Films Developed with the assistance of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board With the support of the MEDIA programme of the European Union Produced with the support of investment incentives for the Irish film industry provided by the government of Ireland Made with the support of the BFI Film Fund
Executive Producers
Malcolm Ritchie
Christopher Collins
James Swarbrick
Tim Smith

CAST

Liev Schreiber
Vincent Campbell
Elias Koteas
Charles Brunel
Romola Garai
Rebecca Lane
Goran Kostic
Marko Petrovich
Johnny Harris
Robert Irwin
Tom Cullen
Richard Harrington
Yusra Warsama
Lauren Dalby
Olivia Williams
Kim Aldrich

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Ireland

8,857ft +8 frames

Mars, the future. At the end of a six-month exploratory expedition, an eight-person research crew discovers evidence of life on the planet. Two expedition members are infected and turn into zombie-like creatures. As the rest of the crew succumb, it's left to Vincent Campbell to prevent the contagious bacterium from being transported to Earth. Potentially infected, he lets his supervising craft decide whether to rescue him.

Locke

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Steven Knight
Certificate 15 84m 47s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Locke is a pessimistic and disturbing film that explores how easily a solid, seemingly grounded life can crumble. Brilliantly written by its director Steven Knight and performed with utter conviction by Tom Hardy (the only actor we see in the film), it has an emotional urgency that stops it seeming like a self-conscious formal exercise. Even so, this is a claustrophobic affair, set entirely in Ivan Locke's car during a fraught night-time journey down the motorway.

At first Locke appears as much in control of his life as he is of his BMW. We can tell that he is a practical and resourceful man by the way he juggles telephone conversations even as he drives at speed. He speaks in a lilting Welsh accent, rarely raising his voice. It is apparent that he has a deep sense of responsibility. He is a building manager, and is taking it on himself to make sure that a delivery at the construction site goes without a hitch even as he is having fraught conversations with both his wife and the woman who is about to have his baby after a one-night stand he deeply regrets. He doesn't want to let anybody down.

The film was shot over a period of six or seven nights, and the actors speaking to Hardy were calling him as he drove. This gives the story some of the immediacy of live drama. The action is deliberately hemmed-in – for 85 minutes we watch a man in a car speaking on a hands-free phone. The filmmakers attempt to create a sense of atmosphere and visual energy by showing the light from other cars reflected on Hardy's face; music is used in atmospheric fashion. There's a sense of movement simply because the car is driving fast along the motorway – but Knight's screenplay would work just as well on radio. The drama here hinges on the voices, not the visuals.

The 'performances' from the actors we hear but don't see register strongly. Olivia Colman conveys the anxiety and diffidence of Locke's mistress Bethan, who is about to go into labour and is terrified of what she faces. Ruth Wilson is equally convincing as Locke's aggrieved wife, who can't forgive, whatever reserves of love and affection she has for him. Countering the prevailing gloom of the film, the drunken musings of Locke's colleague Donal (Andrew Scott) provide a measure of comic relief.

Knight's film is one of several recent one-handers – movies in which lone characters battle against overwhelming problems. Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* and J.C. Chandor's *All Is Lost* are other examples of films in which individuals try desperately to save themselves. The obvious difference is that Locke isn't stuck in outer space or lost at sea. His crisis is all to do with the muddle he has somehow made of his private life.

There's something forlorn and pathetic about the way Locke tells his wife, whom he has no desire to leave, that he only cheated on her once. Once is enough. He has a microscopic attention to detail. As he notes, a single flaw in the foundation can cause an entire building to collapse – and, as his wife makes very clear, there is a huge chasm between 'never' and 'once'. In betraying her, he has crossed that chasm.

Thankfully, Knight's screenplay largely keeps pretentiousness at bay. This is not intended as



Written on the windscreen: Tom Hardy

an absurdist drama about a man alone, forced to confront the existential meaningless of existence. Locke is a resolutely down-to-earth figure with a specialist knowledge of concrete, even if he does speak in occasional mumbling monologues. Hardy has given many grandstanding screen performances, as Batman villains or belligerent British convicts. Here, he is in restrained mode. He needs to keep his eyes on the road – so his scope for big physical gestures is obviously limited.

Knight's achievement is to tell a story in which the lead character's life unravels without any face-

to-face screaming matches or scenes of fights and slamming doors. In a digital, hyper-connected world, Locke's tragedy can be portrayed in full by him sitting behind the wheel of a BMW.

As a film, *Locke* could easily have seemed alienating – an experimental, art-installation-style exercise rather than a dramatic narrative feature. Knight, though, is able to transcend the limitations he has set himself and make us care about this soft-spoken building manager whose very well-ordered life is about to come crashing down. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paul Webster
Guy Heeley
Written by
Steven Knight
Director of Photography
Harris Zambaloukos
Editor
Justine Wright
Music
Dickon Hinchliffe
Production Sound Mixer
John Casali
Costume Designer
Nigel Egerton

©Locke
Distributions, LLC
Production Companies
IM Global presents

a Shoebox Films
production
A film by Steven Knight
Executive Producers
Stuart Ford
Steve Squillante
David Jourdan
Joe Wright

CAST

Tom Hardy
Ivan Locke
Olivia Colman
Bethan
Ruth Wilson
Katrina Locke
Andrew Scott
Donal
Ben Daniels
Gareth
Tom Holland

Eddie Locke
Bill Milner
Sean Locke
Danny Webb
Cassidy
Alice Lowe
Sister Margaret
Silas Carson
Doctor Gallu
Lee Ross
PC Davids
Kirsty Dillon
Gareth's wife

Dolby Digital/ Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK
7.630ft +8 frames

UK, the present. Ivan Locke is a building manager. He is in his car, driving at night down the motorway from Wales to London. During the journey he has a series of conversations on his car phone. He is heading towards a hospital to be with Bethan, who is about to give birth to his child. She is very anxious and wants him to be there. He also talks frequently with his wife and son, and with his colleagues at the building site. A very complicated delivery of concrete is due to take place the next day and Locke is worried that his colleagues aren't competent to deal with it. He tries to talk them through what they must do and what permission they need from the police. He makes small talk with his son about the football team they both support, which is playing as they speak. The son expects him home. Locke also talks with his wife. In the course of his journey it becomes apparent that his life is unravelling: he is about to lose his job and family over a one-night stand with Bethan, a woman he doesn't even care for.

Looking for Light Jane Bown

United Kingdom 2014
Directors: Luke Dodd, Michael Whyte



Portrait of the artist: Jane Bown

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Jane Bown may not be a household name but there's a fair chance that one of her photographs is lurking somewhere in your home: on a dust jacket, magazine or album cover, a black-and-white portrait selected for the flattering manner in which its subject is captured. The title of Luke Dodd and Michael Whyte's documentary about the photographer refers to Bown's gift for working with natural light, but also to her eye for a person's better side. As Bown puts it in her book *Faces*, her peculiar skill is to "get the sitter to show themselves as they want to be".

Looking for Light opens on a Home Counties sitting room: a chintzy, ornamented salon, all ceramic cats and tapestries, seemingly preserved in aspic since the 1930s. There is no music and no voiceover narration. Bown, in pussy-bow blouse and pearls, glass of sherry in hand, is allowed time to deliver long, wistful soliloquies on her work and her childhood. Intercut are numerous stills

from her portfolio, held on screen for up to eight seconds at a time. Their aesthetic is echoed by the framing of talking heads holding forth on Bown and her work. Speakers are bathed in natural light, placed in front of windows and bookcases, in armchairs; they are relaxed, happy, chatty. The tone is cosy, anecdotal and all rather lovely.

It's an appropriate setting in which to meet a woman who even in her thirties was being described by colleagues at the *Observer* (for whom she worked for some 50 years) as "a little old lady". Against the paternalistic culture of mid-century Fleet Street, she surely cut a disarming figure. Yet listening to her collaborators and colleagues describe Bown and her work, it's extraordinary how often she is defined by what she is not: "unstudied", "unpretentious", "unthreatening", "unassuming", "unimposing", "unremarkable" and – worst of all perhaps – "inoffensive".

Faint praise indeed, yet Bown herself feeds the legend with such wilfully self-effacing statements as, "Others take photographs, I find them." Only Sean O'Hagan, one of the film's more astute voices, suggests that there is an element of slyness, of subterfuge to Bown's work, which belies its apparent straightforwardness. Another former sitter, Edna O'Brien, observes that Bown "was very good at being nobody" – the very same quality required, of course, of spies and assassins. She 'cases' the rooms for natural light, 'observes' her subjects before shooting. In one gorgeous, uncredited image we see Bown sardined in among a group of paparazzi jostling for a shot of Bette Davis. She is absolutely still and perfectly focused. She looks like a stalker.

Dodd and Whyte's gentle tribute to Bown mimics the well-crafted simplicity of the photographer's most indelible images (such as her portrait of Samuel Beckett, the centre of an extended discussion here) but lacks their immediacy, their impact – the sound recording is particularly poor. Nonetheless, like so many of Bown's pictures it reveals something unexpectedly tender about its subject. Amid the images and interviews, one sequence sees Bown roving through a cemetery. Among her ancestors' graves she finds a line from Exodus: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." As Bown gently unfurls the story of her turbulent childhood, it is this line that lingers. Whether she found peace amid the souls she captured on film is this documentary's unanswered question.)

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Luke Dodd
Michael Whyte
Photographed by
Michael Whyte
Edited by
Michael Whyte
Sound Re-recordist
Paul Harris

@Luke Dodd,

Michael Whyte
Production
Companies
A film by Luke Dodd
and Michael Whyte
A Hot Property film
in association with
The Observer
Executive Producer

Janine Marmot

In Colour
[178:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

A documentary about the life and work of British photographer Jane Bown. In a series of interviews conducted at her home in Kent, Bown discusses her personal and professional life, at the centre of which is a working relationship with the 'Observer' newspaper spanning some 50 years. Born illegitimately in 1925, Bown was brought up in Dorset by several aunts. In 1946, the 21-year-old Bown, demobbed from the Wrens, enrolled at Guildford School of Art, where she studied photography under Ifor Thomas. Her break came when she was commissioned by the 'Observer' to take Bertrand Russell's portrait, producing a simple yet intimate image that would become her stock-in-trade.

Bown and her son Hugo retrace the early years of her life through old family photographs, while colleagues and sitters comment on their experience of collaborating with Bown. Interviews are punctuated by slideshows of the images themselves, including portraits of Samuel Beckett, Queen Elizabeth, Gina Lollobrigida, Margaret Thatcher, Mick Jagger, Andrei Tarkovsky and P.J. Harvey.

The Love Punch

United Kingdom/France 2013
Director: Joel Hopkins

Reviewed by Kate Stables

With its sunny Continental vistas, breezy premise and starry quartet of older actors sporting reading glasses, this limp, poorly plotted heist-comedy-of-remarriage is aimed squarely at the grey-pound audience who recently packed out *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Quartet*. Leads Emma Thompson and Pierce Brosnan are reduced to arched-eyebrow overplaying to animate the lacklustre script, whose battle-of-the-sexes exchanges abound in sitcom gags ("You don't fancy rubbing some Deep Heat into my coccyx?"). They look positively naturalistic, however, next to stereotypically eccentric neighbours Celia Imrie and Timothy Spall, who mug their way shamelessly through the preposterous jewel-heist plot.

Writer-director Joel Hopkins, whose *Last Chance Harvey* (2008) sounded pleasant notes of middle-aged melancholy, tries to mix the British whimsy of a comedy heist such as *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988) with the rueful gay divorcee slapstick of *It's Complicated* (2009). But the film's suburban themes, its thin and tinny action sequences (an anaemic Parisian car chase, a James Bond-spoofing cliff-scaling session) and a plethora of one-note jokes about ageing keep it firmly in TV-movie territory.



Pierce Brosnan

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Tim Perrell
Nicola Osborne
Clément Miserez
Jean-Charles Lévy

Producers

Clément Sentilhes
Nathalie Nghet

Written by

Joel Hopkins

Director of

Photography

Jérôme Almeras

Editor

Susan Littenberg

Production

Designer

Patrick Durand

Music

Jean-Michel Bernard

Costume Designer

Patricia Colin Line

@Love Punch

Limited/SND

Production

Companies

SND presents a

Process, Love Punch

Limited, Radar Films,

SND production

With the

participation of M6,

W9, 6ter and Canal+

A film by Joel

Hopkins

Executive

Producers

Thierry Desmichelle

Lionel Uzan

Matthieu Warter

Al Munteanu

Nicolas Manuel

CAST

Pierce Brosnan

Richard Jones

Emma Thompson

Kate

Timothy Spall

Jerry

Celia Imrie

Penelope, 'Pen'

Louise Bourgoin

Manon Fontaine

Laurent Lafitte

Vincent Kuger

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

E1 Films

London, present day. Businessman Richard takes his ex-wife Kate to France to recover his company's pension fund, stolen after a takeover by villainous banker Vincent. When that fails, they plan to steal the million-dollar diamond Vincent has bought for his fiancée Manon. Kate befriends Manon. Aided by friends Pen and Jerry, the couple smuggle themselves in disguise into the Côte d'Azur wedding and persuade Manon to dump Vincent and swap the jewel for a fake. Vincent discovers them. His henchmen leave the couple in a van hanging over a cliff edge, until Manon rescues them. Pen and Jerry escape with the jewel. Richard sells it on the black market and replaces the pension fund. He is reconciled with Kate, and they sail away on a small boat.

The Lunchbox

India/France/Germany/USA/Italy 2013
Director: Ritesh Batra
Certificate PG 105m 9s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

The Lunchbox, the debut feature from Ritesh Batra, bears – for better and worse – all the marks of its Sundance Lab genesis. Well crafted for a broad audience, to the point of feeling machine-tooled, the film serves up moments of charm despite, rather than because of, its easy-to-swallow coating.

A May-to-December magic-realist romance lightly flavoured with the specificity of modern Mumbai life, *The Lunchbox* has already broken box-office records in India for an independent film. Unlike *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) or *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), its depiction of contemporary Indian middle-class urban life feels like neither pity porn nor a travelogue, and much of its appeal lies in the texture of dailiness it conjures. The lunchbox of the title is literally the vehicle for the film's metaphor for communication, providing a slim plot as two meals are mixed up by the dabbawallahs whose job it is to deliver them; it is also central to the routine of commuting, cooking and eating that gives the film a genial pace verging on inconsequential.

The core of the film is the meet-cute romance, whereby housewife Ila begins a correspondence with widowed accountant Saajan after the lunch she has prepared to win back her neglectful husband is instead delivered to him. As chaste, old-fashioned and whimsical as the handwritten notes they exchange, the relationship is shaped (or belaboured, depending on your taste) by coincidences, starting with the unexplained misdelivery and proceeding through magically simpatico thinking across the letters, bolstered by the soundtrack. When Ila listens to a classic playback track on her upstairs neighbour's tape deck, for instance, the film crosscuts to Saajan hearing children singing the same song on his commute. The opening shot (oft repeated) of Mumbai's train lines serves notice that the film

will be about connection and movement.

When the film lets go of these conceits, however, it makes space for a heartfelt narrative thread about solitude within marriage and in the commuter city. Saajan's withdrawal from the world since being widowed is delicately explored in a series of quiet scenes that make fine use of Irrfan Khan's contemplative performance. These are offset by an awkward subplot involving Shaikh, his replacement at the insurance firm, a relentlessly upbeat self-starter. In classic shoehorned subplot manner, Shaikh's comedic keenness presents an overly obvious contrast to Saajan's quietude, and his love match with a Muslim girl serves only as an analogy for Saajan's intergenerational romance. Ila and Rajeev's disintegrating marriage is likewise studiously set against the upstairs neighbour, who looks after a paralysed husband, and against Ila's mother, caring for her cancer-stricken father. Ila's mother's outburst of frustration and disgust immediately after his death is one of the film's most dynamic and compelling moments, along with Ila's imagined staging of a mother-daughter suicide that throws Saajan's commute into chaos.

Yet such social realities – including the lives of the dabbawallahs who appear only as a nameless, characterless mass – fade all too easily beneath the romantic top-note of the film. It is, though, a curiously passionless romance, floating in the thin air of the fairytale Bhutan to which Ila imagines escaping. Nimrat Kaur ably conveys both Ila's melancholy and her expertise in the kitchen, but the film is so tentative and passive with her character that her final flight of fancy seems forced. Aspiring, perhaps, to the sensuous power of other kooky romances hinging on the exchange of food – *In the Mood for Love* (2000), for example, or *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) – its good-natured realism lacks the formal ingenuity to convey the tastes and smells that compel Saajan to emerge from his shell. **B**

Magic Magic

USA/Argentina/Chile 2013
Director: Sebastián Silva
Certificate: not submitted 94m

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

There's Alicia (Juno Temple), on the edge of a precipice, about to leap into the water (or perhaps fall on to the rocks) below. She is frozen, terrified, in suspense. Now we see her – and now we don't.

Like so many key scenes in Sebastián Silva's *Magic Magic*, this one is repeated – a doubling that can also be discerned in the film's title and in the ubiquity of parrots (whose constant squawking forms an essential part of the heady soundscape), as well as in the frequent duplication of Alicia's image in mirrors, which by a common cinematic shorthand suggest a split in her identity. Alicia may hesitate to take the plunge but in a sense she had already done so before the film's narrative started, venturing for her very first time outside the United States to visit her student cousin Sara (Emily Browning) in Chile. Arriving exhausted in Santiago, Alicia is immediately swept off on a long car trip to an island holiday house in the south, where she is left with Sara's local boyfriend Agustín (played by the writer/director's brother Agustín Silva), his sister Bárbara (Catalina Sandino Moreno) and his gringo friend Brink (Michael Cera) while Sara attends to some business in the capital. Isolated not just geographically and linguistically but also culturally, this stranger in a strange land, this Alicia in Wonderland, soon just wants to go home.

If Sara dissembles the real reason why she has suddenly returned to Santiago, if Brink's childish japes conceal a manipulative sadism (not to mention closeted feelings towards Agustín), this environment of illusion, alienation and increasing menace also draws out Alicia's own well-hidden secret – paranoid schizophrenia – which may or may not have been exacerbated by Agustín's well-meaning attempts to hypnotise her. Alternatively Alicia may be 'possessed' by a malignant spirit, with local Mapuche shamanism providing the only proper medicine for her particular condition – or just making everything worse. One ambiguity is layered upon the next, while all are amplified through Alicia's distorting, deluded perspective, which renders this insular world strange, if not utterly, uncannily sinister.

Motifs recur and shift in odd, asymptotic constellations, not unlike the maddeningly symmetrical patterns that Agustín uses in his mesmerism (and that appear, in animated form, over the film's closing credits).



Trick of the mind: Juno Temple

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Arun Rangachari
Anurag Kashyap
Guneet Monga
Written by
Ritesh Batra
Director of Photography
Michael Simmonds
Editor
John F. Lyons
Production Designer
Shruti Gupta
Music Composer
Max Richter
Head of Sound Department
Michael Kaczmarek
Costume Designer
Niharika Bhasin Khan

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Cinéma, ASAP Films,
Dar Motion Pictures,
NFDC, Rohfilm
Production Companies
DAR Motion Pictures
presents a Rofilm,
Cine Mosaic, A.S.A.P.
Films, Sikhya
Entertainment
production
In co-production
with ARTE France
Cinéma, National
Film Development
Corporation (India)
With the support
of Medienboard
Berlin-Brandenburg,
ARTE France

With the participation
of Aide aux Cinémas
du Monde, Centre
National du Cinéma
et de l'Image Animée,
Ministère des
Affaires Étrangères,
Institut Français
A film by Ritesh Batra
Supported by Film
Bazaar, Sundance
Institute Feature
Film Program with
additional support
from the Sundance
Institute/Annenberg
Feature Film
Fellowship, Berlinale

Talent Project Market,
TorinoFilmLab,
Medienboard
Berlin-Brandenburg,
Centre National du
Cinéma et de l'Image
Animée, Ministère des
Affaires Étrangères,
Institut Français
Executive Producers
Lydia Dean Pilcher
Irrfan Khan
Ritesh Batra

CAST

Irrfan Khan
Saajan Fernandes
Nimrat Kaur
Ila
Nawazuddin Siddiqui

Shaikh Lillete Dubey
Ila's mother
Nakul Vaid
Rajeev
Bharati Achrekar
Mrs Krishnan
Yashvi Punneet
Nagar
Yashvi
Denzil Smith
Mr Shroff
Shruti Bapana
Meherunnisa
Nasir Khan
Ila's father

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company
9,463 ft +8 frames

Mumbai, the present. Ila, a housewife and mother, prepares a special lunch for her husband Rajeev. However, the usually reliable dabbawallah accidentally delivers the lunchbox to Saajan Fernandes, an accountant at an insurance company, while Rajeev receives Saajan's restaurant-prepared lunch. Saajan, a widower on the brink of retirement, begins exchanging letters with Ila via the repeatedly misdelivered lunchbox. At the same time he finds himself reluctantly mentoring

his replacement, Shaikh, a self-educated orphan. Ila, who is isolated apart from shouted conversations with an upstairs neighbour caring for a paralysed husband, grows closer to Saajan as she discovers that Rajeev is having an affair. They agree to meet but Saajan is disquieted by their age difference and sets off for retirement in Nashik. Later he reconsiders, and uses the dabbawallahs' delivery network to find Ila, who is planning to leave Rajeev and take her daughter Yashvi on a trip of their own.

Whether in Alicia's disturbed mind or via some spirit plane, sounds (for instance a dog's whimpering or a shaman's percussion) bleed irrationally into scenes where they have no proper place – and if Alicia experiences linguistic exclusion and confusion among her hosts, soon they too will experience something similar in the company of the Mapuche. The sick puppy, the dead parrot, the sheep driven over the edge to a watery grave – these are (mostly) realities, but they are also vivid metaphors for Alicia's sense of abandonment and victimhood, as well as elements of correspondence in a ritual of sympathetic magic – for here, the concrete, the psychological and the animistic all blur into one spellbinding whole.

Magic Magic forms an odd diptych with Silva's *Crystal Fairy & the Magical Cactus*. Both were made in the same year, both focus on gringos in Chile and both feature Cera in an unsympathetic role. Yet *Magic Magic* has the literal edge, leaving its viewers poised dizzily between north and south (both of the Americas and of Chile itself), between modernity and tradition, between medicine and magic, and even between life and death. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Frida Torresblanco
Christine Vachon
David Bernad
Mike White

Written by
Sebastián Silva
Directors of Photography
Christopher Doyle
Glenn Kaplan

Edited by
Alex Rodriguez
Jacob Craycroft

Production Designer
Amparo Baeza
Music
Saunders Jurriaans
Danny Bens

Sound Mixer
Claudio Vargas

Costume Designer
Mark Grattan

©Magic, Magic LLC
Production Companies
A Braven Films, Rip
Cord Productions

and Killer Films
production
in co-production with
CineSur & Chilefilms
A Sebastián
Silva Film
Executive Producers
Giovanna Randall
Eric Laufer
Joe Healey
William Winget
Michael Cera
Todd Remis
Pamela Koffler

CAST

Juno Temple
Alicia
Emily Browning
Sara
Catalina Sandino Moreno
Bárbara
Michael Cera
Brink
Augustin Silva
Agustín
Luis Dubó

Bernardo
Roxana Naranjo
Melda
Lorenza Aillapán
Machi
John Carlos Huenchumao
Hector
Rayén Aliquintuy
Laurita

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Koch Media

Not submitted
for theatrical
classification
Video certificate: 15
Running time:
94m 2s

Santiago, Chile, the present. Alicia has just arrived from California to visit her cousin Sara, and is introduced to Sara's boyfriend Agustín, his sister Bárbara and American friend Brink. While Sara stays behind, pretending to resit an exam (but in fact having an abortion), Alicia heads south with the others to an island holiday home, picking up Melda, an indigenous Mapuche, on the way. Upset in turn by an abandoned puppy, a shot parrot, an amorous sheepdog, Brink's creepy advances and her own insomnia, the isolated Alicia starts unravelling mentally. Sara rejoins them. Alicia refuses to do a cliff dive, and goes into further mental decline. One evening, hypnotised by Agustín, Alicia burns her hand in the fire. In her attic room, she hallucinates, and then pushes her crotch into the sleeping Brink's face. Confronted the next day, she breaks down further. Sneaking out at night, she dives from the cliff. Hysterical, she is rushed to the nearest 'doctor' on the mainland, a Mapuche machi who performs a shamanistic ritual in which Alicia appears to die.

The Motel Life

USA 2012

Directors: Alan Polsky, Gabriel Polsky
Certificate 15 89m 59s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The title sounds like a sad country-and-western song, redolent of beer bottles with peeled labels and sleepless nights with the headlights of passing cars flashing across the ceiling of a rented room. This is no coincidence. *The Motel Life* was adapted from a 2006 novel by north-western alt-country musician and author Willy Vlautin, the first film from brothers Alan and Gabriel Polsky, who co-produced and co-directed.

The Polskys are looking to tap into a deep strain of Americana that runs counter to the official national optimism, something to do with western loneliness and songs about trains and pain. We first meet Frank and Jerry Lee Flannigan as adolescents, hitting the road with nothing but their daddy's gold-plated Winchester, when Jerry Lee loses a leg hopping a freight car, like in William Wellman's *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933). That's 'Jerry Lee' as in Lewis: the film's soundtrack is decorated with barstool criers, and the Flannigan brothers' guiding lights are the philosophers of outlaw country. Jerry Lee quotes Willie Nelson chapter and verse, while Frank was mentored by drawling car-dealership owner Earl Hurley – a small role for singer, songwriter and onetime Peckinpah actor Kris Kristofferson.

Kristofferson has the distinction of being the only member of the cast who can say 'ain't' without seeming like he'd rather be saying 'am not'. For a movie that seeks to ground itself in a certain lowlife stratum of the American experience, *The Motel Life* has a serious veracity problem. Having your art director scatter empty beer cans around does not a Sunday morning coming down make – the film's textures seem rented, not lived in. It's a period piece, set in 1990, but curiously this doesn't register until about a third of the way through, when mention is made of the Mike Tyson vs James 'Buster' Douglas bout.

Stephen Dorff plays Jerry Lee, a depressive with a nonexistent sense of self-worth, which he signifies by curling his nose as though he's constantly sniffing shit. The Polskys overlook no opportunity to show off the very convincing effects that allow them to display Jerry Lee's leg, clipped off just under the knee, but this has the curious effect of making Dorff's performance – all sickbed cheekbones and expressive snivelling –



Heartbreak motel: Dakota Fanning, Emile Hirsch

seem less rather than more true. I was reminded of Jean Renoir's casting of Thomas E. Breen as the embittered ex-soldier who's lost a leg in *The River* (1951). Breen really *was* missing a leg, but Renoir never exploits this fact or shows it off; the fact of it is enough. Frank is played by Emile Hirsch, who has lately made something of a specialty of small-town small-timers who think they're smarter than they are and who get in hopelessly over their heads, specifically in William Friedkin's *Killer Joe* (2011) and David Gordon Green's *Prince Avalanche* (2013).

Frank's not the only one who's out of his depth. The Polskys obviously have ambition as filmmakers but at this point it far outstrips their ability. They embellish the Flannigans' journey with cumbersome flashbacks to their troubled youth and animated digressions showing the fantasies of strength and virility through which the brothers escape the hapless reality of their adult lives. They even try a show-off Steadicam shot, with Hirsch and two of his buddies wending their way through a casino, but this feels dragged out rather than bravura. The virtuosity is wasted because the very thing the shot is meant to highlight – camaraderie signified by comfortable, familiar ensemble acting – isn't there. *The Motel Life* is intended as a honky-tonk heartbreaker but nobody's taught the band to play together. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gabriel Polsky
Alan Polsky
Ann Ruark
Written by
Noah Harpster
Micah Fitzerman-Blue
Based on the novel
by Willy Vlautin
Director of Photography
Roman Vas'yanov
Editors

Hughes Winborne
Fabienne Rawley
Production Designer
Ryan Warren Smith
Composers
David Holmes
Keefus Green
Sound Mixer
Mikhail Sterkin
Costume Designers
Kurt & Bart
Animation Created/Designed by

Mike Smith
©Motel Life LLC
Production Company
Polsky Films
Executive Producer
Drew Hall

CAST

Emile Hirsch
Frank Flannigan

Stephen Dorff
Jerry Lee Flannigan
Dakota Fanning
Annie James
Kris Kristofferson
Earl Hurley
Joshua Leonard
Tommy
Noah Harpster
Al Carey
Garrett Backstrom
young Jerry Lee
Andrew Lee

young Frank
Doc DiVecchio
boss man
Nancy Youngblut
mom
Jenica Bergere
Polly Flynn
Oren Skoog
Barry Hurley

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

wDistributor
Independent
Distribution

8,098 ft +8 frames

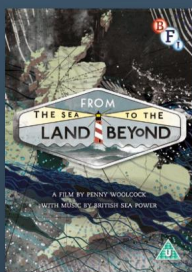
Reno, Nevada, 1990. Brothers Frank and Jerry Lee Flannigan live in a seedy motel. The two have been inseparable since they were on the road together as children, when Jerry Lee lost a leg attempting to jump a freight train. Today they have only alcohol and their imaginations to help them escape grim reality: Frank spins stories and Jerry Lee draws comic illustrations. One night Jerry Lee comes home splattered with

blood. He's hit a child with his car and has fled the scene. The brothers decide to flee Reno but Jerry Lee is hospitalised after torching the incriminating car and shooting himself in his mutilated leg. Betting on the Mike Tyson vs James 'Buster' Douglas fight, Frank earns enough money to buy a new car and take Jerry Lee to Elko, where Frank's ex-girlfriend Annie lives. Jerry Lee dies; Frank moves to reconcile with Annie.

THE BIG MELT

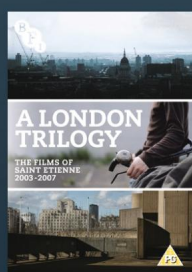
How Steel Made Us Hard

ALSO AVAILABLE



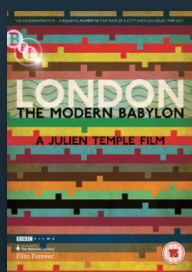
FROM THE SEA TO THE LAND BEYOND

Music by British
Sea Power.



A LONDON TRILOGY

The films of
Saint Etienne.



LONDON THE MODERN BABYLON

Directed by
Julien Temple.



MISINFORMATION

COI films re-scored by
Mordant Music.



A FILM BY
MARTIN
WALLACE
& JARVIS
COCKER
THE BIG MELT
WITH MUSIC
BY JARVIS
COCKER

A film by Martin Wallace and Jarvis Cocker.
Soundtrack recorded live at 2013 Sheffield Doc/Fest.

'A remarkable marriage of music,
film and British history'

★★★★★

INDEPENDENT

Muppets Most Wanted

Director: James Bobin
Certificate U 112m 44s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

With the backstage 'let's put on a show' quality of their stories, their showbiz special guest stars and their built-in hecklers Waldorf and Statler, the Muppets productions have always had a junior Brechtian quality, and *Muppets Most Wanted* is no exception – in fact it may be the logical endpoint of this tendency. It's a 'movie' rather than a movie: having wrapped on their last feature as this latest begins, the Muppets launch straightaway into brainstorming their next project in a number called 'We're Doing a Sequel'. "The studio considers us a viable franchise!" squeals Miss Piggy.

Pointing out the by-the-numbers, formulaic silliness of its premise is the principal recurring joke of *Muppets Most Wanted* – in fact, it's pretty near the only one. Only the Muppets themselves seem unfamiliar with the shopworn material at hand. One of the film's villains, played by Ricky Gervais, presents himself to the Muppets troupe in the guise of a well-wisher, though they might be tipped off to his actual motives by the fact that his name is Dominic Badguy. ("It's French," he explains, "It means... 'good man'.") The other bad guy is a frog, Constantine – an ersatz Kermit puppet with a jutting underbite and curling upper lip, which looks like it's being controlled by an arthritically gnarled hand. Though Constantine speaks in a dense Eastern European patois, the fact that he's an imposter somehow evades the slow-on-the-uptake Muppets, just as Constantine and Dominic's rather transparent criminal masterplan baffles the clueless law-enforcement agents on their trail, the Euro-American/human-Muppet teaming of Interpol's Jean Pierre Napoleon (Ty Burrell) and the CIA's Sam the Eagle (voiced by Eric Jacobson). When Fozzie Bear finally puts everything together, a lightbulb literally pops over his head.

The script is by *Get Him to the Greek* screenwriter Nicholas Stoller and James Bobin (*Da Ali G Show*, *Flight of the Conchords*), who respectively co-wrote and directed 2011's *The*



A shaggy frog story: *Muppets Most Wanted*

Muppets. (The other prime architect of that film, star and co-writer Jason Segel, has bowed out.) Judging from trade reviews, some critics have taken exception to the filmmakers' cocksure assumption, blithely on display in their film, that the appeal of the Muppet 'viable franchise' and the universal goodwill towards Jim Henson's familiar cast of characters are enough to allow them to show outright disdain for plot. And such presumptuousness should be galling except, well, they're not entirely wrong. I must report that I laughed, and not infrequently.

I laughed at the easy cracks about tiny Continental cars and huge Continental vacations, facilitated by the presence of Burrell's farcical Frenchman. I laughed at Constantine practising his Kermit impression with a voice like he's swallowed a quart of buttermilk. I laughed when the Swedish Chef fleetingly appeared in the chess-with-death tableau from *The Seventh Seal*. None of this managed fully to obscure the fact that the celebrity cameos (Usher, Zach Galifianakis, Chloë Grace Moretz, some allegedly famous person called Ross Lynch) were arbitrary, or that the songs by the Conchords' Bret McKenzie didn't inspire much beyond a faint impatience, and that the staging of the musical numbers was lacklustre. Finally, the movie is every bit as unnecessary and amusing as it thinks it is – and so it's hard to say that it makes any mistakes. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

David Hoberman
Todd Lieberman

Written by

James Bobin
Nicholas Stoller

Director of

Photography

Don Burgess

Edited by

James Thomas

Production Designer

Eve Stewart

Music

Christophe Beck

Original Songs

Bret McKenzie

Sound Mixer

John Midgley

Costume Designer

Rahel Atiley

Production

Companies

Disney presents a

Mandeville Films

production

Executive Producers

John G. Scotti
Nicholas Stoller

Cast

Ricky Gervais

Dominic Badguy

Ty Burrell

Jean Pierre Napoleon

Tina Fey

Nadya

Steve Whitmire

Kermit/Beaker/

Statler/Rizzo

Eric Jacobson

Miss Piggy/Fozzie

Bear/Animal/

Sam the Eagle

Dave Goetz

Gonzo/Dr Bunsen

Honeydew/

Zoot/Waldorf

Bill Barretta

Rowlf/Swedish

chef/Dr Teeth

David Rudman

Scooter/Janice/

Wayne

Matt Vogel

Constantine/Robin/

Floyd Pepper

Peter Linz

Walter

Usher

the usher

Zach Galifianakis

Hobo Joe

Chloë Grace Moretz

newspaper girl

Ross Lynch

florist

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Buena Vista

International (UK)

10,146 ft +0 frames

Hollywood, present day. The Muppets are contacted by a manager, Dominic Badguy, who proposes to arrange a European tour for them. Dominic is secretly in league with Constantine, a frog master criminal who is the doppelganger of Muppet leader Kermit and who has just escaped from a Siberian Gulag. Kermit is thrown into the Gulag in Constantine's place, and Constantine replaces Kermit on the Muppets tour. While Kermit arranges a prison talent show under the watchful eye of camp boss Nadya, the unsuspecting Muppets perform dates across Europe in venues adjacent to places that Dominic and Constantine plan to break into – the show giving them a perfect alibi for their crimes. Meanwhile CIA agent Sam the Eagle and Interpol agent Jean Pierre Napoleon follow the trail of burglaries to London. The imposter Kermit, really Constantine, is scheduled to marry Miss Piggy in the Tower of London – a smokescreen to cover up Dominic's theft of the Crown Jewels. Fozzie Bear, Animal and Walter discover Constantine and Dominic's plans and head to Siberia to help Kermit. Kermit escapes and arrives in London just in time to stop the marriage. Constantine and Dominic are apprehended, the Muppets apologise for taking Kermit for granted, and they all travel to the Gulag to perform a showstopping final number.

Non-stop

France/USA/United Kingdom/Canada 2014
Director: Jaume Collet-Serra
Certificate 12A 106m 2s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

If *Non-stop* stopped it would fall out of the sky, so it never stops. Like the fighter jets that appear towards the end, threatening to shoot down the hijacked airliner at the film's centre should it come near any tall buildings, *Non-stop* is in a state of permanent disequilibrium. It has plenty of thrust but cannot glide: there is little narrative logic, and the story 'arc' is less elegant parabola than squiggle. It is kept up by a series of rapid adjustments no human could make: characters go from love interest to prime suspect and back, without consequence, at supersonic speed. It is hardly worthy of – is scarcely capable of – contemplation once the ride is over, but while aloft it's tremendous.

The plane's hijackers, the nature of their scheme and their ludicrous motivation are only revealed in the last few minutes of the film, leaving no time for anyone, on screen or watching it, to attempt to piece together what has gone before. Everything hinges on everyone – in particular their chief antagonist-slash-fall-guy, Liam Neeson's grieving, alcoholic air marshal Bill Marks – behaving exactly as the bad guys predict, which they pretty much do. The hijackers' aim is to frame the vulnerable Bill for a series of murders, parachute out before their bomb explodes and collect the \$150 million ransom paid into a bank account in Bill's name – all in order to demonstrate to the American public the shortcomings of the Transportation Security Administration.

Perhaps their most stupendous feat is hiding the bomb in a bag of cocaine inside the suitcase of a corrupt second air marshal, then using the existence of the cocaine to blackmail him into allowing them on to the TSA's phone network, and *then* somehow fixing it so that he forces Bill to kill him at the *exact* moment they said a passenger would die. There is a rare, compound pleasure in seeing Neeson return to the bag of cocaine to discover the bomb he did not notice while testing the goods a few score plot-points earlier. There is a simpler yet still considerable pleasure in seeing Neeson repair to the lavatory with a bottle of Scotch and pack of cigarettes mid-crisis.

Unlike the grim *Taken* films, *Non-stop* does not take itself too seriously – Julianne Moore



Unsafe hands: Liam Neeson

Omar

Director: Hany Abu-Assad
Israel [Palestine]/United Arab Emirates 2013



Dangerous occupation: Eyad Hourani, Samer Bisharat, Adam Bakri

appears more than once to be sending things up, and Corey Stoll (*House of Cards*) enjoys himself as a bigoted Noo Yawk cop – but director Jaume Collet-Serra never allows the levity to get out of control. It takes a particular set of skills to be this silly: the check-in sequence, in which the potential wrong'uns are introduced, is a fine weave of meaningful glances and half-conversations, seen and heard from Bill's point of view – which itself is left ambiguous. It is only later that he is established as a federal agent, and even then, and for some time afterwards, the possibility that he is indeed in cahoots with the hijackers, or suffering from a split-personality condition, cannot be dismissed. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Joel Silver
Andrew Rona
Alex Heineman

Screenplay

John W. Richardson
Chris Roach
Ryan Engle

Story

John W. Richardson
Chris Roach

Director of

Photography

Flavio Martínez
Labiano

Editor

Jim May

Sound Mixer

Danny Michael

Costume Designer

Catherine Marie

Thomas

©TF1 Films
Productions S.A.S.,
StudioCanal S.A.

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures
and StudioCanal

present a Silver

Pictures production

in association

with Anton Capital

Entertainment

S.C.A. and Lovefilm

A Jaume Collet-

Serra film

With the

participation of

the Government of

Canada Film or Video

Production Services

Tax Credit and the

Province of British

Columbia Production

Services Tax Credit

Executive

Producers

Steve Richards

Herb Gaines

Olivier Courson

Ron Halpern

Jeff Wadlow

CAST

Liam Neeson

Bill Marks

Julianne Moore

Jen Summers

Scot McNairy

Tom Bowen

Michelle Dockery

Nancy

Nate Parker

Zach White

Corey Stoll

Austin Reilly

Lupita Nyong'o

Gwen

Omar Metwally

Dr Fahim Nasir

Jason Butler

Harner

Kyle Rice

Linus Roache

David McMillan

Shea Whigham

Agent Marenick

Anson Mount

Jack Hammond

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

Colour by

Technicolor

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

9,543 ft +0 frames

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Hany Abu-Assad's first Palestinian-set feature since 2005's *Paradise Now* uses the West Bank as the backdrop to a melodrama-cum-thriller that is as much concerned with the personal politics of love and betrayal – and with wrong-footing its audience with plot twists – as it is with the wider context of its subjects' lives under occupation. Its action can consequently feel a little more slick than heartfelt, as if it could have been set against any conflict, in any historical moment, with any suitably handsome young crop of stars. But the sense of place is strong in the striking visual design and cinematography, and fine performances do get across the specific weariness and paranoia of lives that have never known freedom from violence, and that have been lived out entirely on disputed territory.

The film's focus on undercover investigators, secret deals and double-crossing informants complicates the often binary presentation of the West Bank conflict. Not only is one

person's terrorist another's freedom fighter but that freedom fighter might well be a double or triple agent. Romantic love, meanwhile – the primary motivation for many of the characters' choices – is a corrupted and suspect quantity; a fitting metaphor, perhaps, for the blinkered and malformed love of country.

The eponymous young male protagonist (Adam Bakri) and his friends Tarek (Eyad Hourani) and Amjad (Samer Bisharat) might joke lightly about women's attractiveness, but actual sex is a frighteningly powerful force, capable of tempting them to betray both friendship and convictions. The film's closing emotional revelation is a gut-punch worthy of 19th-century fiction, and also goes some way to absolve the film of the suspicion of blaming too much on its sole female character. That it's followed by a further 20 minutes of intrigue and yet another twist is an unfortunate pacing decision, but one typical of a film that dulls its emotional force somewhat by having too much going on. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Hany Abu-Assad

Producers

Waleed F. Zuaier

David Gerson

Written by

Hany Abu-Assad

Director of

Photography

Ehab Assal

Co-editors

Martin Brinkler

Eyas Salman

Production Designer

Nael Kanj

Supervising

Sound Editor

Dominik Schleier

Costume Designer

Hamada Attallah

©Omar Production

Company LP

Production

Companies

A Zbros production

Dubai Entertainment

and Media

Organisation

co-production in

association with

Enjaaz A Dubai Film

Market Initiative

Executive Producers

Abbas F. Eddy Zuaier

Ahmad F. Zuaier

Waleed Al-Ghafari

Zahi Khouri

Farouq A. Zuaier

Suhail A. Sikhti

CAST

Adam Bakri

Omar

Leem Lubany

Nadia

Waleed F. Zuaier

Agent Rami

Samer Bisharat

Amjad

Eyad Hourani

Tarek

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Soda Pictures

Shortly after boarding a flight from New York to London, air marshal Bill Marks receives a text message from an unknown sender threatening to kill a passenger every 20 minutes unless \$150 million is paid into a numbered bank account. Bill enlists the help of Jen, the passenger sitting next to him, and Nancy, an air stewardess. At the 20-minute mark, Bill himself kills the plane's second air marshal, Jack Hammond, in a fight, after discovering that Hammond has been blackmailed into allowing the mystery texter on to their secure network.

Bill is able to conceal the corpse, but when it is revealed that the bank account is in his name, the Transportation Security Administration disavows his actions. Bill retains the trust of Jen and Nancy, but his efforts to unmask the texter, who continues to issue the same threat every 20 minutes, make him unpopular with the passengers. After the pilot is found dead, Bill becomes a suspect. The co-pilot is instructed to land in Iceland. Bill is attacked by a group of passengers moments after discovering a bomb inside a bag of cocaine in Hammond's case, but he manages to persuade them to help him move the bomb where it will cause least damage. Eventually Bill unmasks the two malefactors, who reveal that their motive is to demonstrate the TSA's ineptitude by pinning the bombing on Bill. The bomb explodes just as the plane begins its descent. Bill kills both of the bombers during the chaos, and the plane lands safely.

The West Bank, the present. Omar, Tarek and Amjad are childhood friends and secret activists. Both Omar and Amjad are in love with Tarek's sister Nadia. The three friends carry out a plot to shoot and kill one of the guards patrolling the separation wall between Israel and the occupied West Bank; Amjad pulls the trigger. Omar is captured and tortured. In prison, a friendly agent, Rami, offers Omar the chance of freedom if he hands over Tarek, wrongly believed to be the killer. Released, Omar tells Tarek what he has agreed to do, and the two plot an ambush at the planned handover. Omar asks Tarek for Nadia's hand; Tarek agrees, if Omar can prove by the ambush that he is not an informer. Omar sees Nadia talking with Amjad. She tells Omar that persistent rumours call him a traitor. At the planned handover/ambush, Omar and Tarek are shot at; Tarek flees and Omar is recaptured. He asks Rami for another chance to deliver Tarek. He is fitted with an electronic tag and is released again. Nadia, now convinced that he is a traitor, rejects him; he sees her with Amjad again. He meets with Amjad and confronts him. Amjad confesses that Nadia is pregnant with his child; the

Israeli agents know this and have blackmailed Amjad into informing on Omar and Tarek. The two of them meet with Tarek. Patting them down, Tarek finds Omar's tag. Omar tells Tarek about Nadia's pregnancy; lunging at Amjad, Tarek falls and fatally strikes his head. Omar hands his body over to Rami. He helps Amjad to propose, gives him the money he has saved to marry Nadia, and tells him to say when the baby is born that it is premature. Tarek is given a martyr's funeral. Two years pass. Omar is approached by the new leader of Tarek's activist group, who lets him know that the circumstances of Tarek's death are judged suspect; and by Rami, who again offers him protection in exchange for information. Omar goes to see Nadia, who now has two children. Omar determines that Amjad was lying about her pregnancy, that he failed to deliver a letter of apology from Nadia to Omar, and that she accepted his proposal only because she thought Omar no longer wanted her. Omar calls Rami and says that he will deliver Amjad, but wants to deal with him himself. He meets with Rami, tells him he has never used a gun and asks to be shown how one works. When Rami hands over his gun, Omar shoots him.

Pioneer

Norway/Germany/Sweden/Finland/France 2013
 Director: Erik Skjoldbjærg
 Certificate 15 111m 26s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Harking back to classic conspiracy thrillers in the vein of *The Conversation* and *Three Days of the Condor* – but never quite catching either's crucial combination of menace and ambiguity – Erik Skjoldbjærg's 1970s-set *Pioneer* is an intriguing historical exercise: it explores how Norway, thanks to its fortuitous geographical position and the ruthless ambition of both homegrown and American oil prospectors, came to be the world's wealthiest country for a time. Given its blend of bubbling outrage at nefarious corporations and a flawed-yet-righteous central character, it's unsurprising the rights have already been snapped up by George Clooney (Hollywood's leading liberal, and a paranoia-thriller veteran).

Our antihero-cum-patsy is gruff working-class Norwegian Petter (Aksel Hennie, sporting a magnificent handlebar moustache), who loses his brother Knut (André Eriksen) in a mysterious accident during a test dive in a practice tank. The distraught Petter responds to the tragedy by going on the warpath and demanding justice from the American company in charge of the dive, but is met by a stony wall of silence.

Pioneer is genuinely interesting up until the point at which it's made clear that Petter himself is beyond reproach. The possibility that he could in some way be culpable lends the film an early frisson of tension: could our hero be paranoid or delusional? Sadly Skjoldbjærg shows his hand too soon. The labyrinthine plot becomes simultaneously almost impossible



Deep space brine: Wes Bentley, André Eriksen

to follow and ploddingly predictable, thanks to the *Scooby Doo*-esque dastardliness of nearly everybody bar Petter and his brother's widow (a woefully underutilised Stephanie Sigman). Wes Bentley gives a particularly OTT, twitchy performance as a hot-tempered American diver, while a scowling Stephen Lang (as US company boss Ferris) is seedier than a garden centre. Matters aren't aided by a thudding, repetitive and manipulative score by French electronic act Air.

Despite its overall laboriousness, *Pioneer* remains watchable thanks to its carefully crafted period aesthetic (Jallo Faber's cinematography bathes proceedings in a fug of careworn 70s jaundice) and horribly claustrophobic underwater scenes, which rival Alfonso Cuarón's recent *Gravity* for evincing sheer discomfort. Also commendable is Hennie's muscular, energetic performance as the wronged man: it's a shame such a turn isn't anchoring a better film. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Christian Fredrik Martin

Screenplay

Hans Gunnarsson
 Cathinka Nicolaysen
 Kathrine Valen Zeiner
 Erik Skjoldbjærg
 Nikolaj Frobenius

Director of Photography

Jallo Kekkarainen

Editor

Frida Eggum
 Michaelsen

Production Designer

Karl Jøllusson

Original Music

Air

Sound Design

Frédéric Le Louët

Costume Designer

Anne Pedersen

©Ferland Produksjon

AS, Pandora

Film, ZDF/ARTE,

Garagefilm

International AB, Film

i Väst, MRP Matila

Röhr Productions,

Les Films d'Antoine,

ARTE France Cinéma,

Nordisk Film

Production

Companies

Ferland presents a

Ferland Produksjon,

Pandora

Filmproduktion,

Garagefilm

International,

Nordisk Film, Film

i Väst, MRP Matila

Röhr Productions,

Les Films d'Antoine

co-production

in collaboration

with Nordisk

Filmdistribusjon, ZDF/

Arte, Arte France and

Arte France Cinéma,

Trust Nordisk, Bio Rex

Distribution, Filmkraft

Invest, Chimney,

Film Factory,

NRK, Sveriges

Television, YLE

With support from

Norsk Filminstitutt,

Eurimages,

Nordisk Film &

TV Fond, Svenska

Filminstitutet,

Finlands

Filmstiftelse, Film

und Medienstiftung

NRW, Filmförderung

Hamburg Schleswig-

Holstein, i2i Fond,

Media Programme of

the European Union,

Centre national

du cinéma et de

l'image animée

Developed in

collaboration

with Ateliers du

Cinéma Européen

Executive Producer

Asle Vatn

Film Extracts

Dykkef (1989)

CAST

Aksel Hennie

Petter

Wes Bentley

Mike

Stephanie Sigman

Maria Salazar

Jonathan LaPaglia

Ronald

Ane Dahl Torp

Pia

Jorgen Langhelle

Leif

André Eriksen

Knut Hamsen

Eirik Stubo

Ivar Jeger

David A. Jorgensen

Jorgen Heimland

Endre Hellevest

Trond

Stephen Lang

John Ferris

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Arrow Films

10,029 ft +0 frames

Norwegian

theatrical title

Pionér

Norway, the 1970s. Petter and his brother Knut are hired by an American company to investigate the possibility of laying pipelines 500 metres below the North Sea. Knut dies during a test dive. Petter holds a technician responsible but is told by boss Ferris that he himself was to blame. Petter questions Jorgen (the third man in the diving tank) but Jorgen has a seizure. Petter visits Leif, the company doctor, who reveals that he knew Jorgen suffered from seizures. Jorgen confesses his 'guilt' – but there is no mention of a seizure in the official report. Leif shows Petter a videotape of the incident, which reveals that Petter passed out. He tells Petter that the US gas had a potentially dangerous component: if he can find the gas sample that belonged to Knut, he can reveal all. Petter gets hold of the sample but Leif is found dead. Later, Petter is attacked by a mystery assailant. Jeger, a lawyer, advises Petter to return to diving, because the Americans need at least one Norwegian diver. Petter persuades Pia, an assistant, to share more of the gas sample with him. On the final verification dive, Petter surreptitiously tests the gas and it makes him feel faint. He keeps the remainder of the gas hidden. Petter confronts Ronald, Ferris's assistant, and says he'll go public if the latter doesn't tell him what's in the gas. Ronald reveals that the gas contains a necessary anaesthetic – but it was Leif's dangerous experiments with the gas that caused Knut's death. Ferris traps Petter in a pressure tank and demands to know where the gas is. Petter escapes. Jorgen tells Petter that everybody is in on the conspiracy, including Jeger. Petter's houseboat is blown up, killing Jorgen (Petter swims to safety). Ferris tries to bribe Knut's widow but Petter finds out and goes public, forcing Ferris into a televised retraction. Jeger – installed as CEO of a new Norwegian piping company – asks Petter for the sample. He reluctantly agrees.

A title card reveals that Norway soon became the world's wealthiest country on account of its oil-drilling capabilities.

The Quiet Ones

United Kingdom/USA 2013
 Director: John Pogue
 Certificate 15 97m 50s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

With the occasional, unnervingly effective blast of Slade's 'Cum on Feel the Noize' on the soundtrack (used in a sleep-deprivation experiment) and an array of wide collars and hot-pants on the younger cast members, *The Quiet Ones* is the first 21st-century Hammer film to evoke the moment when the original company branched from period gothic horror (a mode revisited by *The Woman in Black*) into a troubled, troubling, contemporary supernaturalism typified by *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* (1971) and *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976). The films of this era have accrued their own patina of silver-age genre nostalgia but at the time they felt uneasy, as British horror cinema tried to keep up with innovations coming out of America and cast around for new forms.

The Quiet Ones betrays confusion about what type of horror film it wants to be. The credit "Based on a screenplay by Tom de Ville" suggests a complicated development, borne out by the mix of the currently popular 'found footage' style (much of the movie consists of material apparently shot in a narrower aspect ratio within the story, though we see that film burned at the climax) and regular objective narrative. It also boasts a 'based on a true story' caption and goes so far as to use the convention (seen in, for instance, *The Conjuring* and *The Haunting in Connecticut 2: Ghosts of Georgia*) of including in the end credits photographs of the 'real' people to whom all this horror is supposed to have happened. However, those photos seem to be a misdirection, and any nugget of a factual basis for this made-up story is elusive. It may be that the original inspiration was 'the Philip Experiment', conducted in Toronto in 1972 (and recently fed into the film *The Apparition*), though that involved researchers effectively trying to wish a ghost into existence by imagining one, whereas the story here has more in common with the dozens of possession, poltergeist or psychic phenomena movies made since *The Exorcist* first pulled the based-on-fact stunt.

Directed by John Pogue (who made the direct-to-DVD sequel to the found-footage remake *Quarantine*), *The Quiet Ones* boils down to a clash between a stern, unethical, personally involved professor (Jared Harris, valiantly persuasive) and a humane, appalled, curious sceptic (Sam Claflin, lost at sea) as to whether the haggard subject of their investigations (Olivia Cooke) is possessed and channelling evil spirits like Regan or psychic and lashing out telekinetically like Carrie. In the end, thanks to an untidy tangle of plotting, both solutions apply. Any question of what exactly is going on gets lost in a welter of licks lifted from every parapsychology potboiler from *The Entity* to *Paranormal Activity*. The film keeps almost having new ideas or connecting with its material in an interesting way – a sudden blackout seems to be caused by psychic discharge, though the UK was having power outages in 1974, which the script fails to establish – then pulling back to throw in shocks contrived through sudden edits or bursts of sound.

Despite clunkiness, belief-stretching plot circumstances and seesawing between filmmaking styles, *The Quiet Ones* does stir an

The Raid 2 Berandal

Indonesia/USA 2013

Director: Gareth Huw Evans



Girls and noise: Erin Richards, Olivia Cooke

air of dread, which comes from the ambiguous interplay between Harris and Cooke. Everyone else in the old dark house, however, is superfluous to requirements until it's time to create enough jump moments to compete with the *Paranormal Activity-Insidious* brand of supernatural terror. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Steven Chester
Prince
Ben Holden
James Gay-Rees
Simon Oakes
Tobin Armbrust
Screenplay
Craig Rosenberg
Oren Moverman
John Pogue
Based on the
screenplay by
Tom de Ville

Director of

Photography
Mátyás Erdély

Edited by

Glenn Garland

Production

Designer
Matthew Gant

Music

Lucas Vidal

Sound Recordist

Henry Milliner

Costume Designer

Camille Bender

@Tiger Shark

Productions Limited

Production

Companies

Exclusive Media

presents in

association with

Traveling Picture

Show Company

a Hammer Films

production in

association with

Midfield Films

Developed in

association with

Momentum

Executive

Producers

Nigel Sinclair

Guy East

Marc Schipper

Jillian Longnecker

Alex Brunner

Kevin Matusow

Kate Bacon

Carissa Buffel

Cast

Jared Harris

Professor Joseph

Coupland

Sam Claflin

Brian McNeil

Erin Richards

Kristina Dalton,

'Krissi'

Rory Fleck-Byrne

Harry Abrams

Olivia Cooke

Jane Harper

Laurie Calvert

Phillip

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

8,805 ft +0 frames

Oxford, 1974. Professor Coupland, who believes that paranormal events are caused by inherent human capabilities rather than by external evil forces, recruits cameraman Brian McNeil to document his work with troubled Jane Harper, who seems to be in contact with a spirit she calls Evie. When the university authorities disown his project, Coupland relocates Jane to an isolated house and continues the study with the assistance of students Kristina and Harry. Jane manifests various telekinetic and pyrokinetic abilities, and sometimes lashes out at the students. Brian becomes interested in Jane; when she exhibits a sigil-like scar on her skin, he researches the case of Evie Dwyer, who was raised in a satanic cult and supposedly perished in 1954 after killing her parents. Brian and Coupland argue – Brian believes that Evie is a spirit possessing Jane, while Coupland insists that Jane has simply heard of the girl's story. It transpires that Jane is Evie, and she again turns her abilities against those she feels are exploiting and oppressing her. Jane/Evie unleashes her powers, murdering Kristina, Harry and Coupland; her energy then seems to take over Brian.

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

The Indonesian-based Welsh writer-director Gareth Huw Evans had a surprise hit in 2012 with *The Raid*, a lean and vicious game of cops-vs-criminals set inside and around an imposing Jakarta tower block. Its vertical setting allowed for a microcosmic, smartly integrated socioeconomic commentary to complement the mayhem, but the sequel – which begins at the exact point where the first film left off – opens things out in almost every conceivable way. The action unfolds across a host of locations, the running time is pumped up to an elephantine 148 minutes (from the original's brisk 101), subplots and characters are introduced at a dizzying rate and, most notably, the first film's not-inconsiderable but tightly controlled combat has metastasised into a florid, fetishistic orgy of violence redolent of the self-consciously shocking work of Gaspar Noé and Nicolas Winding Refn.

Like Joshua Oppenheimer's hotly debated documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012), Evans posits contemporary Indonesia as a land where violence (or at least its ever-present threat) is used as an intractable tool of control and oppression, while the lines between cop, criminal and civilian are all but indistinguishable. This theme is established early, when heroic cop Rama (Iko Uwais) – who singlehandedly saved the day in the first film – is cold-bloodedly coerced by his supervisor Bunawar (Cok Simbara) into accepting the onerous mission that provides the basis of the plot: go undercover in a notoriously brutal jail in order to get close to Uco (played with convincing smarm by Arifin Putra), the son of a dangerous criminal overlord. Rama, understandably, would rather get back to a civilised life with his wife and young son, but it becomes apparent when Bunawar casually murders Rama's acquaintance – not because he's done anything wrong but because he might be tempted to err in the future

– that such an option won't be on the table.

Evans is evidently an action director of rare skill, and he creates a procession of set pieces that are extremely impressive in conception and execution. The high point arrives early with a thrillingly staged mass riot in a mud-caked prison yard. Balletic choreography and fluid camerawork are married with an acute sense of spatial clarity and an awareness of how the characters relate to each other; amid all the mayhem, it is here, wordlessly, that the crucial bond between Rama and Uco is forged. It's almost matched by a late, kitchen-set tête-à-tête that broaches levels of straightforward aggro Gordon Ramsay could only dream about.

Unfortunately, Evans's storytelling engine has been infected by bloat and rote. Following the fluid opening, which plays dazzlingly with chronology, *The Raid 2* devolves into a limply conventional – and needlessly convoluted – thriller, punctuated by sequences of combat. A further drawback is the evident pleasure taken by Evans in conjuring ever more imaginative means of violence and ever more cartoonish characters to administer them. The clinical restraint of *The Raid*'s violence was brutal, but shocking depictions of impact were almost always followed by a brisk cutaway, forcing viewers to process what they'd seen while the breathless narrative continued apace. Though scenes of hand-to-hand martial-arts combat remain exciting and mesmeric here, Evans has departed, disappointingly, from his approach in the first film. We're treated to numerous sordid images of gaping wounds, smashed skulls and bodies eviscerated by claw hammers. We even get a leering close-up of a man's face after it's been seared on a hotplate alongside some carrots and broccoli. The cumulative effect of such showboating grotesquerie is nauseating and ultimately enervating. 



Unlucky strike: Very Tri Yulisman

Bolstering *The Raid 2*'s quease factor is an oddly sentimental streak, which sits at odds with its hard-boiled exterior: it seems to be aiming for familial tragedy but falls short. The oleaginous Uco is a cross between John Cazale's hapless Fredo in *The Godfather* films and Vincent Cassel's preening gadabout Kirill in *Eastern Promises*; like these characters, he might be an inept psycho but (until he eventually cracks) all he really wants to do is prove himself to his father. There's also a misjudged subplot in which we discover that a hardcase community enforcer (Yayan Ruhian) has fallen badly behind on his child-support payments. It slows the film down badly and, in the ultraviolent world that Evans has created, its attempts at emotional impact ring hollow. Still, the film's excitingly sustained moments of carefully choreographed chaos make its longueurs — and horribly gratuitous violence — worth enduring. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Ario Sagantoro
Nate Bolotin
Aram Tertzakian
Written by
Gareth Huw Evans
Directors of Photography
Matt Flannery
Dimas Imam
Subhono
Edited by
Gareth Huw Evans
Music
Joseph Trapanese
Aria Prayogi
Fajar Yuskemal
Sound Mixer
Ichsan Rachmaditta

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Production Companies
Sony Pictures

Classics presents
in association with
Stage 6 Films a
PT.Merantau Films
and XYZ Films
production
A Gareth Huw
Evans film
Executive Producers
Rangga Maya
Barack-Evans
Irwan D. Mussyri
Todd Brown
Nick Spicer

CAST

Iko Uwais
Rama
Arifin Putra
Uco
Oka Antara
Eka

Tio Pakusadewo
Bangun
Alex Abbad
Bejo
Julie Estelle
hammer girl
Matsuda Ryuhei
Keichi
Endo Kenichi
Keichi's father,
Goto gang leader
Kitamura Kazuki
Ryuichi
Cok Simbara
Bunawar

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
E1 Films

Jakarta, Indonesia, present day. Rookie cop Rama has been successful in his mission to rid a tower block of a violent drug-dealing operation and now wants to retire to lead a peaceful life. However, Bunawar, chief of Jakarta's anti-corruption taskforce, asks Rama to get himself imprisoned so that he can develop links with Uco, the incarcerated son of crime boss Bangun, ahead of an undercover mission. Rama reluctantly agrees and assumes a false identity as a violent criminal named Yuda. Inside, he gains Uco's confidence by fighting on his behalf. Uco is released, and Rama becomes part of Bangun's inner circle when he is himself released two years later. Rama places a wiretap in Uco's wallet. Unbeknown to Bangun, who runs the city in partnership with Japanese crime lord Goto, the ambitious Uco is planning a takeover in partnership with vicious self-made gangster Bejo. Uco sparks a turf war by arranging the killing of 'Koso', Bangun's most loyal assassin. Violence explodes across the city. Bangun, however, refuses to go to war. A frustrated Uco shoots Bangun dead. Rama (who has been attempting to get himself extricated from his mission) witnesses the murder, and escapes with Bangun's loyal henchman Eka, who is also revealed to be a mole. Goto orders the termination of all his rivals, including Reza, the corrupt police commissioner. Rama and Eka make their way to Bejo's HQ. Eka is killed but Rama bests a string of henchmen. Uco realises that he is about to be betrayed by Bejo, and kills both him and Reza. Rama kills Uco. An exhausted Rama is confronted by Goto's men.

The Sea

United Kingdom/Ireland 2013
Director: Stephen Brown
Certificate 12A 86m 21s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Should novelists be encouraged to adapt their own work for the screen? *The Sea* is by no means the disaster that was *Midnight's Children*, but anyone who admires John Banville's 2005 Man Booker Prize-winning novel will be disconcerted to find that, despite an impressive cast and the author on solo screenwriting duty, so much has gone missing in its transit to cinema.

Part of the problem, ironically enough, lies in the high quality of Banville the novelist's own writing. His prose is rich, allusive, poetic; dialogue is relatively sparse and unexceptional but the descriptions of character, place and above all psychological states are intensely vivid and evocative. In itself the plot is nothing so unusual. A young boy gets caught up in emotional vectors he's too immature to grasp, with consequences that'll haunt his whole life — and yes, L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* at once comes to mind. What gives the novel its distinction is its charged, darkly crafted tone. And as everyone who's attempted to adapt Joseph Conrad for the movies has discovered, a writer's tone is the hardest thing for the cinema to capture.

To their credit, Banville and director Stephen Brown (making his feature debut) haven't resorted to the obvious expedient of plastering the film with long stretches of first-person authorial voiceover. It must have been tempting, since we see the action entirely through the eyes of Max Morden, man and boy, as he broods in a present-day seaside guest house and relives two traumatic episodes: the recent death of his wife from cancer and his boyhood encounter with the intriguingly rakety Grace family. As the adult Max, Ciarán Hinds brings granitic despair to the role, mouth downturned in a rictus of disillusion and grief. The rest of the cast make what they can of largely



Time and tied: Natascha McElhone, Rufus Sewell

underwritten roles, though Rufus Sewell goes seriously OTT as Carlo Grace, capering and doing funny accents to amuse his unimpressed kids. The film's most effective scenes are between Max and his dying wife Anna (Sinéad Cusack), refreshingly devoid of sentimentality as she gives vent to years of suppressed irritation.

Brown makes effective use of colour-coding for his different time zones — bleak greys and bruised metallic blues for current events, an exaggeratedly bright golden wash for the falsely idyllic past — and John Conroy's cinematography turns the sea itself into a tangible, looming presence. But the over-frequent flashbacks, smooth transitions in the novel, come to seem choppy and irksome. And the climactic tragedy, foreshadowed from the start, is fudged. Inevitably so, perhaps — child actors can hardly be shown indulging in the kind of physical intimacies that, in the source material, preface the Grace twins' inexplicable act. But some subtle way of implying them could surely have been found. As it is, we're left with a film that — like its protagonist — dispiritingly fails to live up to its potential. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Luc Roeg
Michael Robinson
David Collins
Screenplay
John Banville
Based on his novel
Director of Photography
John Conroy
Editor
Stephen O'Connell
Production Designer
Derek Wallace
Music
Andrew Hewitt
Sound Recordist
Simon Willis
Costume Designer
Kathy Strachan

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Production Companies
Independent presents
in association
with Rooks Nest
Entertainment
an Independent/
Samson Films
production
In association with
Quicksilver Films
Made in association
with RTE
With the support of
the Broadcasting

Authority of Ireland
With the participation
of Bord Scannán
na hÉireann/The
Irish Film Board
Developed by
Independent Film
Productions
Developed with
the assistance of
Bord Scannán na
hÉireann/The Irish
Film Board and
Element Pictures
Produced with the
support of investment
incentives for the
Irish Film Industry
provided by the
government of Ireland
Executive Producers

Andrew Orr
Philip Herd
Ernest Bachrach
Rebecca Long
Steve Spence
Michael Sackler
Julia Godzinskaya
Film Extracts
The Wicked Lady (1945)

CAST

Ciarán Hinds
Max Morden
Charlotte Rampling

Miss Vavasour
Natascha McElhone
Connie Grace
Rufus Sewell
Carlo Grace
Bonnie Wright
Rose
Sinéad Cusack
Anna
Karl Johnson
Colonel Alfred
Blunden
Ruth Bradley
Claire
Matthew Dillon
young Max
Missy Keating
Chloe Grace
Padhraig Parkinson
Myles Grace

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Independent
Distribution

7.771ft +8 frames

Ireland, 2005. Following the death of his wife Anna from cancer, art historian Max Morden returns to the quiet seaside resort where he once holidayed with his parents. Intending to work on his study of Bonnard's paintings, he stays at the Cedars, a guest house run by Miss Vavasour.

In 1955 the Cedars was rented by the bohemian Grace family: eccentric Carlo, his easygoing wife Connie, twins Chloe and Myles and their nanny Rose. The 11-year-old Max, an only child with emotionally distant parents, becomes fascinated by the eccentric Graces, tags along with them and starts falling in love with both Connie and Chloe. Chloe receives his puppy-love with a mixture of pleasure and disdain, while Myles, who's mute, acts up unpredictably, often making fun of Max, though Rose is the main target of his mischief.

The adult Max, tormented by grief for his wife and disturbed by his childhood memories, takes refuge in drink. He remembers inadvertently witnessing Carlo and Connie making love, and being dismayed to find that Carlo is having a casual affair with a girl who works in the village store. The adult Max gets into a drunken fight in the local pub and comes off worse. Stumbling down to the beach, he remembers how Rose came across him, Chloe and Myles in a beach hut, with Chloe showing Max affection. When Rose reacted to the scene, Chloe and Myles walked into the sea and drowned themselves. Adult Max falls into the sea but is rescued by Colonel Blunden, a fellow guest at the Cedars. The next day Max leaves to return home; Miss Vavasour, who is in fact Rose, sees him off.



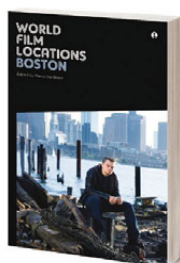
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Published April 2014



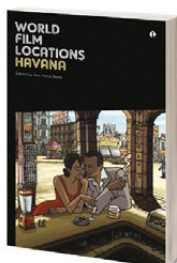
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ISBN 9781783201990
Paperback 128 pages
Price £15.50
Published April 2014



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Edited by Scott Jordan Harris
ISBN 9781783201136
Paperback 132 pages
Price £15.50
Published July 2013



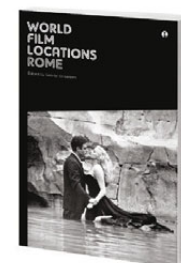
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Edited by Ann Marie Stock
ISBN 9781783201976
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Published April 2014



World Film Locations: Hong Kong

Edited by Linda Chiu-Han Lai and Kimburley Wing-Yee Choi
ISBN 9781783200214
Paperback 116 pages
Price £15.50
Published July 2013

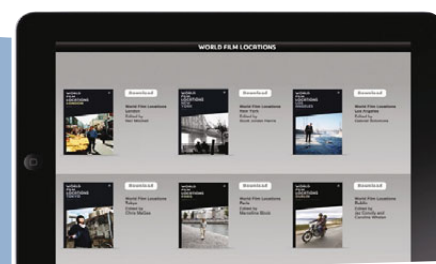


World Film Locations: Rome

Edited by Gabriel Solomons
ISBN 9781783202003
Paperback 128 pages
Price £15.50
Published May 2014

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300 Rise of an Empire

USA 2013
Director: Noam Murro
Certificate 15 102m 28s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

This sort-of sequel to *300* (2006) for the most part rotates stylised ultra-violence, hoarse 'rousing speeches' from ripped Athenian commander Themistokles (Sullivan Stapleton) and scenes of psychotic warrior queen Artemisia (Eva Green) snogging decapitated heads and the like. Blood flies towards the camera in slow motion and 3D with wearying frequency. As in the original, whose narrative line *Rise of an Empire* parallels, Persian barbarism menaces nascent Athenian democracy. Whereas the first film told the story of the Spartans who checked the Persians' advance on land, *Empire* concerns Themistokles's attempts to defeat them at sea, culminating in the Battle of Salamis. (It is unclear which empire is rising.)

A charitable view of the earlier film, which was directed by Zack Snyder, is that its deliberate eschewal of surface verisimilitude made for a novel use of CGI, but Snyder's replacement Noam Murro has done nothing to advance on his predecessor's work; the result is once again ugly and repetitive, however interesting in theory. As if to encapsulate *Empire*'s redundancy, in one scene Spartan queen Gorgo (Lena Headey) explains exactly *why* her husband Leonidas kicked a Persian messenger down a well and shouted "This! Is! Sparta!" – *300*'s main bequest to pop-cultural posterity. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Gianni Nunnari Mark Canton Zack Snyder Bernie Goldmann Screenplay Zack Snyder Kurt Johnstad Based on the graphic novel <i>Xerxes</i> by Frank Miller Director of Photography Simon Duggan Edited by Wyatt Smith David Brenner Production Designer Patrick Tatopoulos Music Junkie XL Production Sound Mixer Mark Holding Costumes Designed by Alexandra Byrne Visual Effects Scanline VFX MPC Cinesite VFX Ltd Stunt Coordinators Jim Halty Guillermo Grisop	Matthew Rugetti Ryan Watson Tim Rigby ©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Legendary Pictures Funding, LLC Production Companies A Warner Bros. Pictures and Legendary Pictures presentation A Cruel and Unusual Films/Mark Canton/Gianni Nunnari production Executive Producers Thomas Tull Frank Miller Stephen Jones Craig J. Flores Jon Jashni	Aeskyllos Rodrigo Santoro Xerxes Callan Mulvey Scyllias David Wenham Dilios Jack O'Connell Xerxes Andrew Tiernan Ephialtes Igal Naor King Darius Andrew Pleavin Daxos Dolby Digital/ Datasat Colour by DeLuxe Prints by Technicolor [2.35:1] Some screenings presented in 3D Distributor Warner Bros Distributors (UK) 9,222 ft +0 frames
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CAST

Sullivan Stapleton
Themistokles
Eva Green
Artemisia
Lena Headey
Queen Gorgo
Hans Matheson

480 BC. The Persian king Xerxes, encouraged by the warrior queen Artemisia, attacks the Greek city states, which are slow to unite in defence. While the Persians' advance on land is held up by the Spartans, the Athenian commander Themistokles takes on Artemisia's navy. Artemisia is impressed by Themistokles and seduces him, but fails to recruit him to her side. After the death of her husband at Thermopylae, the Spartan queen Gorgo brings her fleet to assist the Athenians at the Battle of Salamis. During the battle, Themistokles kills Artemisia; the Persians are routed.

Tracks

Australia/United Kingdom 2013
Director: John Curran

See
Development
Tale, page 14

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Though deserts are dynamic environments, they also tend towards a certain visual uniformity, ensuring that any object placed within them – be

it a tree, an Uluru-sized monolith or a woman leading a camel train – is likely both to offset, and be offset by, their isolating vastness. When director John Curran (*We Don't Live Here Anymore*, *The Painted Veil*) decided to turn the story of Robyn Davidson's solo trek across the Western Australian desert into a feature film, he already had Rick Smolan's celebrated photographs of the journey as a template for his particular vision. Yet much of what makes *Tracks* (adapted by Marion Nelson from Davidson's memoir) so compelling is the way these sprawling, forbidding vistas are made to serve not only as grand cinematic spectacles in themselves but also as canvases that chart the more inaccessible parts of the protagonist's psyche.

"When people ask me why I'm doing it, my usual answer is, 'Why not?'" says Davidson (Mia Wasikowska) in voiceover near the beginning of the film – but her flippant, because-it's-there response hardly dispels the question. In fact, hints of something deeper driving this young woman's 1,700-mile, 175-day walkabout come in the opening images, where the sight of her solitary figure trudging through shimmering desert haze is intercut with an impressionistic, out-of-focus flashback to a small but significant number of steps she took in her childhood, away from everything she loved. For this journey is also an odyssey, an exploratory return to the unresolved sense of isolation and loss that disrupted the home life of her youth after her mother hanged herself and the 11-year-old Davidson had to go and live with her aunt, leaving her father and beloved pet dog behind. Davidson is accompanied on her cross-country voyage not only by four camels and her (new) dog Diggity, but also by her mother's old compass and a tape recording of her favourite album. Davidson may claim, "If this trip was inspired by anyone, it was my father" – a father

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Emile Sherman Iain Canning Screenplay Marion Nelson Based on the book by Robyn Davidson Inspired by the photographs of Rick Smolan Director of Photography Mandy Walker Editor Alexandre de Franceschi Production Designer	Melinda Doring Composer Garth Stevenson Sound Recorder David Lee Costume Designer Mariot Kerr ©See-Saw (Tracks) Holdings Pty Limited, A.P. Facilities Pty Limited, Screen Australia, South Australian Film Corporation, Screen NSW and Adelaide Film Festival	Production Companies Screen Australia presents in association with South Australian Film Corporation, Adelaide Film Festival, Screen NSW, DeLuxe, HanWay Films and Cross City Sales a See-Saw Films production A film by John Curran Developed with the assistance of Screenwest and	Lotterywest Financed with assistance from DeLuxe Financed in association with Adelaide Film Festival, Screen NSW, South Australian Film Corporation Principal development and production investor: Screen Australia Executive Producers Andrew Mackie Richard Payten	Xavier Marchand CAST Mia Wasikowska Robyn Davidson Adam Driver Rick Smolan Rolley Mintuma Mr Eddy Rainer Bock Kurt Posel Robert Coleby Pop John Flaus Sallay Tim Rogers	Glendle Lily Pearl young Robyn Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Part-subtitled Distributor E! Films
--	---	--	---	---	--

Alice Springs, 1975. Robyn Davidson arrives with her dog Diggity, determined to obtain some camels and trek solo across the Western Australian desert to the Indian Ocean. After working first with camel-owner Kurt and then with Sallay, she gains experience and puts together a team of four camels. She turns to 'National Geographic' for sponsorship, and reluctantly agrees to meet with her sister's friend, the photographer Rick Smolan, at three points on the journey. Setting



Name that dune: Mia Wasikowska

who, much like Davidson herself, was an avid explorer and "happiest on his own out in the bush" – but when, on finding her missing camel Dookie, Davidson exclaims with uncharacteristic anger, "Don't ever leave me!" or when, later, lamenting the death of Diggity, she wails, "I miss her so much," one can discern the ghost of the absent mother, and a daughter's raw feelings of abandonment and yearning being disinterred and exorcised.

Towards the end of the trek, as Davidson becomes dehydrated and delirious, the landscape too becomes hallucinatory, and we are not quite sure where the dreams (chiefly of nooses, or noose-like snakes) end and the sweltering, mirage-filled realities begin. Davidson's headscape and the surrounding landscape have finally met at the horizon, in a wide-open place with its own psychogeography. The film, like Davidson herself, treats with sensitive curiosity the many Aborigines encountered on the journey, so that the Australian wilderness becomes a land of Dreaming.

All of which is far more subtly presented on screen than it might sound on the page. Even Davidson's occasional intimacy with Smolan (played by Adam Driver of TV's *Girls*) remains understated, never turning into full-blown epic romance. If Davidson is elusive – free-spirited yet determined, independent yet needy, misanthropic yet lonely – her contradictions are placed in stark relief by the wastelands she makes her restless home. **S**

off in 1977, she travels mostly alone but encounters on her way missionaries and other white locals, Aborigines (including Eddy, an elder who walks with her through a sacred zone), curious tourists, a press pack and Smolan himself, who though at times intimate with her remains respectful of her need for solitude. Davidson fights off wild bull camels and must eventually shoot her beloved Diggity after the dog eats strychnine. She makes it to the coast, met by Smolan.

20 Feet from Stardom

USA 2013

Director: Morgan Neville
Certificate 12A 90m 30s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"Singing background remains a somewhat unheralded position... But that walk to the front is complicated. It's a conceptual leap," opines Bruce Springsteen, kicking off director Morgan Neville's exuberant, hit-studded, full-to-bursting documentary celebrating the black female backing singers who added their distinctive sounds to many classic pop and rock songs but found stardom elusive.

Springsteen is the most insightful of a set of very famous stars (Mick Jagger, Stevie Wonder, Sting) who, in a neat reversal, give out here a chorus of analysis and praise for the women who would usually be harmonising behind them. Even in a film dedicated to their own artistry, backing singers need the boosting imprimatur of stars alongside the use of their famous songs. In the spotlight here are some of "the most incredible artists you've never heard of", such as Phil Spector veteran Darlene Love, and Merry Clayton, whose career stretched from Raelette (Ray Charles gave her a hard time about a stray note) to creating the scorching scream of "Rape, murder – it's just a shot away" on the Rolling Stones' 'Gimme Shelter'.

Almost all the women featured in Neville's documentary have tried – and mostly failed – to launch successful solo careers, and they and the megastars interviewed offer a raft of possible reasons. These range from music-business exploitation (Love's tricky treatment from Spector) or lack of ego (sublime singer Lisa Fischer couldn't parlay a Grammy-winning single into a career) right down to Sting's opinion: "It's not about fairness or talent, it's about luck."

Consciously avoiding a *Dreamgirls* vibe that suggests their failure was a showbiz tragedy, Neville lets his subjects unabashedly strut their stuff. He hails their achievements by weaving an energetic oral history from their pop-heritage anecdotes, their greatest hits and lively slabs of archive footage, where the Ikettes whoop and shimmy infectiously, or Luther Vandross sings silkily behind Bowie for 'Young Americans'.

Taking a rich, enjoyably overstuffed 90 minutes to gallop from the 1960s to the present day, the film provides an excellent explanation of the gospel roots of the kind of call-and-response back-up singing that the music business suddenly craved, helped by canny Dr Mable John, one-time Motown singer. From then on, Neville seems to choose his central stories to illuminate different facets and narrative arcs of back-up singing. They're loosely limned as the survivor (Love, forced to ghost-sing 'He's a Rebel' for Spector), the diva (Clayton, channelling black rage into Lynyrd Skynyrd's 'Sweet Home Alabama'), the spiritual vocation of 'Empress of Back-up' Fischer, and young hopeful Judith Hill, a singer-songwriter seeking the big time. Predictably, after the film was completed, Hill was voted off the TV talent show *The Voice* for being too much of an industry professional, proving that 'underdog' is a relative position.

However, Fischer is the standout here, engagingly eloquent about the sheer love of singing that has forged her impressive back-up career (she's featured on every Stones tour since 1989). Generous with her explanations of vocal



Striking accord: Merry Clayton

work and the joy she finds in the communality of making music, her plangent-to-powerful studio examples illustrate how invaluable versatile vocal work is to a hit record. *Twenty Feet from Stardom's* forte is this confident mix of insider information and raise-the-hairs-on-your-arms entertainment. Unable to stage a concert-of-the-overlooked in the manner of *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999) or *Standing in the Shadows of Motown* (2002), it puts its leading ladies together in softly lit studios to lay their own sheen on famous songs. Even the image design connives to put them centre-stage at last, coloured dots wittily obscuring the famous stars' heads in the opening credits archive footage.

Less nimbly, there's an equally soft sheen on the political themes that this story of cultural appropriation touches on. There is glancing discussion of race, particularly in Love and Clayton's more fraught episodes, but gender

politics are restricted to a teasing mention to ex-backing singer Claudia Lennear of her 'Brown Sugar' past in a *Playboy* spread. Granted, this is feelgood pop history, not a PBS cultural-studies fest, but a bit of sharp-eyed commentary from Stanley Crouch or bell hooks (who years ago flamed the ethnic and sexual stereotyping of Tina Turner and Aretha Franklin) wouldn't have hurt. Neville is simply happy to let his ladies testify in their own words, gospel-style – finally, they can get a witness. Ultimately, performance isn't only the film's subject, it's also its preferred mode of address, whether it's Merry Clayton's flamboyant account of her 2am session with the Stones or Darlene Love's triumphant rendition of 'A Fine, Fine Boy' at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, capping her long struggle for stardom with the kind of emotional high note the film both demands and excels at. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gil Friesen
Caitrin Rogers
Directors of
Photography
Nicola B. Marsh

Graham Willoughby
Editors
Jason Zeldes
Kevin Klauber
Production Sound
Dennis Hamlin

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Production
Companies
A Gil Friesen and
Tremolo production
Executive Producers

George Conrades
Art Bilger
Peter Morton
Joel S. Ehrenkrantz
Dolby Digital

In Colour and
Black and White
[L78:1]
Distributor
Altitude Film

Distribution
8,145 ft +0 frames

A documentary in which American backing singers discuss their careers, spanning from the 1960s to the present day, interspersed with archive footage and new studio sessions. Merry Clayton and Claudia Lennear recall the tough discipline of being a Raelette and an Ikette. Dr Mable John examines the gospel-choir grounding of many backing singers. Darlene Love talks about ghost-singing 'He's a Rebel' and about the difficulties with Phil Spector that frustrated her solo career. Bruce Springsteen, Mick Jagger, Lou Adler, Bette Midler, Sting and Stevie Wonder praise the key contributions of backing singers. Clayton recalls adding vocals to 'Gimme

Shelter' and discusses her unease about singing on Lynyrd Skynyrd's 'Sweet Home Alabama'. Clayton, Lisa Fischer and Tāta Vega tell of their attempts to build solo careers. Fischer enthuses about the musical and spiritual joys of back-up singing; she recalls Luther Vandross's early career as a backing singer. The Waters family talk about their long career backing artists such as Michael Jackson. The film also follows Judith Hill, a backing singer hoping to launch a solo career. Interviewees discuss the current decline in recording sessions. The film ends with an account of Darlene Love finding a solo career later in life, and her induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Veronica Mars

Director: Rob Thomas
Certificate 12A 107m 27s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Passionate fans of the three-season detective show *Veronica Mars* (this reviewer hasn't had the pleasure) helped to get the green light for a belated movie continuation by donating \$2 million within ten hours to Kickstarter – an origin story more compelling than the film's actual narrative. An underwhelming mystery (seemingly loosely modelled on Natalie Wood's mysterious yacht death), *Veronica Mars* the movie reunites residents of the fictional "seedy beach town of Neptune, California", as Kristen Bell's jam-packed expository opening narration has it.

In between will-she-won't-she tension about whether Veronica (Bell) will get together with troubled former boyfriend Logan (Jason Doherty), there's much winky dialogue about the unexpected reunion of cast members separated for seven years ("Look at us, falling right back into our old rhythms"). There's a jokey reference to Veronica previously considering rebuilding her life with a Kickstarter campaign but deciding not to (because of the "potential humiliation"), part of a near-indexical slew of current internet business references (Instagram, Twitter, Etsy, Pinterest).

The show had a reputation for getting desirable indie acts as guest stars but the film's soundtrack choices don't help much: setting a late-night car ride to the soaring strings of Sufjan Stevens's 'Chicago' nearly ten years after its use in *Little Miss Sunshine* is unimaginatively hoary. Literal old rhythms or not, the bantering tempo is rushed without exhibiting particular wit, most lines landing into a thudding silent void meant to be occupied by audience laughter.

Hopefully at least fans will feel that they got the reunion they paid for. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rob Thomas
Dan Etheridge
Danielle Stokdyk

Screenplay
Rob Thomas
Diane Ruggiero

Story
Rob Thomas
Based on characters created by Rob Thomas

Director of Photography
Ben Kutchins

Edited by
Daniel Gabbe

Production Designer
Jeff Schoen

Music
Josh Kramon

Sound
Steven Grothe

Costume Designer
Genevieve Tyrrell

Production Companies
Warner Bros.
Digital presents
a Spondoolie

production Executive Producers
Joel Silver
Kristen Bell
Jenny Hinkley

Cast
Kristen Bell
Veronica Mars

Jason Doherty
Logan Echolls

Krysten Ritter
Gia Goodman

Ryan Hansen
Dick Casablancas

Francis Capra
Eli Navarro, 'Weevil'

Percy Daggs III
Wallace Fennel

Chris Lowell
Stosh Pizarnski, 'Piz'

Tina Majorino
Cindy Mackenzie, 'Mac'

Enrico Colantoni
Keith Mars

Sam Huntington
Luke Haldeman

Ken Marino
Vinnie Van Lowe

Amanda Noret
Madison Sinclair

Daran Norris
Cliff McCormack

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

9,670 ft +8 frames

Now a New Yorker, former sleuth Veronica Mars returns home to Neptune, California, to help former boyfriend Logan Echolls, who is suspected of the murder of pop-star girlfriend Bonnie DeVille. Veronica solves the case, reunites with Logan and moves back home to restart her detective career.

We Are the Best!

Sweden/Denmark/Norway 2013
Director: Lukas Moodysson
Certificate 15 101m 48s

See Feature on page 42

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Lukas Moodysson's status as the prodigy of Swedish cinema has somewhat faded in recent years, partly as a result of following two abrasively experimental

films (*A Hole in My Heart*, *Container*) with the leaden globalism statement *Mammoth*. *We Are the Best!* comes as a surprise – at once a return to the youth-feminist energy of his 1998 debut *Show Me Love* and a return to comedy, 14 years after his much loved *Together*. Compared to the director's darker work, *We Are the Best!* might seem an easy option but it's clearly a very personal film – not least because it is based on a comic strip by his wife Coco Moodysson. She is presumably the original for Bobo (the candid, solemnly androgynous Mira Barkhammar), whose early-teen insecurities provide the film's emotional focus.

Set in the early 80s, *We Are the Best!* feels bang-on about the punk experience of the time, because it is at once about getting it right and getting it wrong. The pubescent proto-Riot Grrrl trio get it wrong in that they arrive on the scene way too late: everyone keeps saying that punk is dead, Klara's big brother has moved on to Joy Division and the other girls at school dance in pink Lycra to the Human League. And yet the trio get it right in that they represent the essence of the original punk idea – reacting to boredom and banality, seizing the moment, defiantly cheeking the adults and would-be adults around them. And they do it with only one song in their repertoire – magnificently brattish protest number 'Hate the Sport', into which the outspokenly political Klara (Mira Grosin) compresses all her rage, and for which the subtitles come through with flying colours: "The atomic bombs blow up our cities, yet you want more tennis committees."

Despite the trio's gaucheness, they come across as authentic feminist heroines, models of creative self-determination. Like their characters, the three young leads, who go at their parts with infectious ebullience and daring, seem to create themselves as we watch – Barkhammar and Grosin are apparently trying their instruments for the first time, while Liv LeMoyne as Hedvig audaciously undergoes the screen baptism of

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Lars Jönsson
Screenplay
Lukas Moodysson
Based on the graphic novel *Aldrig godnatt* by Coco Moodysson
Director of Photography
Ulf Brantås
Editor
Michał Leszczyłowski
Production Designers

Linda Janson
Paola Holmér
Sound Design and Mix
Hans Möller
Costume Designer
Moa Li Lemhagen
Schalin

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Production Companies
Memfis Film presents

In co-production with Film i Väst, Sveriges Television, Zentropa EntertainmentS
In association with Danmarks Radio
With the support of Svenska Filminstitutet, Danska Filminstitutet, Nordisk Film & TV Fond
Produced by Memfis Film Rights AB

CAST

Mira Barkhammar
Bobo
Mira Grosin
Klara
Liv LeMoyne
Hedvig
Johan Liljemark
Kenneth
Mattias Wiberg
Roger
Jonathan Salomonsson
Elis

Alvin Strollo
Mackan
Anna Rydgren
Bobo's mum
Peter Eriksson
Bobo's dad
Charlie Falk
Linus
Lena Carlsson
Klara's mum
David Dencik
Klara's dad
Emrik Ekholm
Klara's little brother

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

9,162 ft +0 frames

Swedish theatrical title
Vi är bäst!

Stockholm, 1982. Twelve-year-old female misfits Bobo and Klara are united by their passion for punk. At their youth club, they get metal band Iron Fist thrown out of a rehearsal slot, claiming that they have a band too. Although they can't play, they decide to form a band for real, and enlist shy schoolmate Hedvig, a talented guitarist. Bobo and Klara persuade Hedvig to let them cut her hair; as



Liv LeMoyne, Mira Barkhammar, Mira Grosin

having her long hair cropped on film. This is a movie about self-liberation and about friendship overcoming obstacles and romantic rivalry, and a reminder of why teenagers have traditionally formed bands: the mere act of saying "We're in a band" makes it so, whether or not you have any instruments, songs or talent. In one scene, Klara reminds the depressive Bobo about what's good in her life: "You're in the world's greatest band." And, in the moment she says it, of course it's true.

There is some material here that you perhaps need to be Swedish and of a certain age to appreciate fully – such as the exact cultural significance of the band Ebba Grön. Other humour is of more general period relevance – the self-absorbed post-hippie laxness of Bobo's divorcee mother and Klara's embarrassing clarinet-playing dad, for instance. There's also a terrific double act in unreconstructed 70s rock clods Kenneth and Roger, the youth-club workers who think they can teach this 'girl band' how a guitar is handled – then blanch at Hedvig's fretboard prowess.

Generally atmospheric and relaxed, the film only itself erupts into frenetic punk mode during the end credits, as the girls lark around with cheerful obnoxiousness in a fast-food outlet. *We Are the Best!* is a low-key pleasure. It is perhaps not a project that tests Moodysson as a director but it resoundingly shows his brilliance at directing young performers; he'd be a hell of a lot better at running a youth club than Kenneth and Roger. **S**

a result, Hedvig's devout mother tries to blackmail them into going to church. The three girls contact Elis and Mackan, boys from a local punk band; Bobo and Klara fall out over Elis's affections but Hedvig makes peace between them. Youth-club workers Kenneth and Roger book the band and Iron Fist to play in another town. The girls' act provokes a riot; they return from their debut gig in triumph.

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We Are the Freaks

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Justin Edgar
Certificate 15 71m 44s

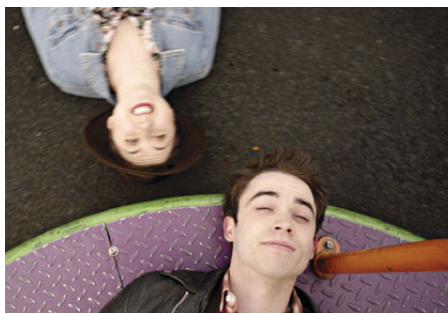
Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

A confident Bueller-esque voiceover swiftly sets the agenda for this coming-of-age saga from the tail-end of Thatcher's premiership. Jamie Blackley's Midlands school-leaver Jack addresses the viewer while ambling through suburbia, declaring his loathing of mods, skinheads, goths, rioters... and, of course, films where the protagonist talks to camera.

Ironic attention-grabber delivered, Justin Edgar's film then sets itself the challenge of deciding what it actually stands for, instead of defining itself in opposition to sundry youth cultures of the day. As the title suggests, however, the film's protagonists have little in common except their misfit status, since Jack's straitened family circumstances leave him potentially reliant on a local-council grant should he get a university offer, in stark contrast to the ever-smug Chunks (Sean Teale), who's unapologetically sponging off his divorced wealthy parents and has the sports car to prove it. Meanwhile their seemingly docile pal Parsons (Mike Bailey) yearns to leave home and Thatcher-loving parents behind. With Jack's uncertain academic future providing just enough intrigue to move the story forward, the scene is set for some formative experiences on a night of misadventure.

Indeed, situation comedy proves the film's strongest asset, rather than any long-term structural or thematic development, since Edgar's able cast engagingly play off the inventive travails that befall them after they gatecrash a Young Conservatives soiree. Hence Parsons's over-enthusiastic outdoor coupling with his splendidly lugubrious girlfriend Clare (Rosamund Hanson, a find) prompts bloodlettingly serious damage to his gentlemanly parts, brief hospitalisation and an encounter with Michael Smiley's volatile drug-dealer Killer Colin, which brings distant echoes of Park Chanwook's *Oldboy* to a town-centre chip shop.

It's this mid-section where the whole thing



One day: Rosamund Hanson, Jamie Blackley

really clicks into gear, what with Chunks facing up to the prospect of adult responsibility after a rubber-burning car-park session in his Porsche goes terrifyingly awry, and Jack too is forced to admit that he lacks the strength of character to pair off with Oxbridge-bound Elinor, whose demure looks are no indication of the substance-fuelled hedonist emerging after dark. Another filmmaker would have had the protagonist joining her wild-child gyrations on the dance floor as affirmation that this ostensible geek could do 'cool' after all, but Edgar in this instance pleasingly bucks expectations.

Yet if Jack refuses to fall for this particular bait, what is it that makes him special enough to take centre-stage in the story? Ultimately, that's a question you feel Edgar has never fully resolved, since the cold light of morning brings for our bruised and ego-battered trio essentially the same uncertainty with which they'd greeted the previous day. There's a tacit acknowledgement that the well-worn formulae of adolescent rites-of-passage tales don't always apply in the real world, though even that doesn't get us especially far. The zesty humour, likeable cast and energetic direction, however, all suggest that with a bit more application, Edgar could have given us something even more memorable than this amiable but ultimately flimsy diversion. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Justin Edgar
Alex Osborne

Written by

Justin Edgar

Director of

Photography

Felix Weidemann

Film Editor

Philip Arkinstall

Production Designer

John Ellis

Original Music

Vincent Watts

Sound Recordist

Oliver Rotchell

Costume Designer

Heidi McQueen-Prentice

Investments

Supported by

Creative Skillset

Film Skills Fund

Executive Producer

Gareth Jones

CAST

Jamie Blackley

Jack

Natalie Danks Smith

Jack's mum

Athena Stevens

Jack's sister

Jo Enright

Jack's manager

Mike Bailey

Parsons

Amanda Lawrence

Pauline Parsons

Dominic Coleman

Roy Parsons

Amber Anderson

Elinor

Rosamund Hanson

Clare

Sean Teale

Chunks

Joy McBrinn

Granny Nightmare

Adam Gillen

Splodger

Michael Smiley

Killer Collin

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

6,456 ft +0 frames

Suburban England, 1990. Teenager Jack hopes to go to university but his family's financial straits make him reliant on the prospect of a local-authority grant. In the meantime, he has a clerical job and hangs out with his schoolfriends, geeky Parsons and Porsche-driving Chunks – the latter unapologetically living off guilt money from his divorced parents. Parsons gets drugs from volatile dealer Killer Colin, who somehow takes a shine to him. Jack, Parsons and Chunks gatecrash a Young Conservatives gathering hosted by a family friend of Parsons's girlfriend Clare; Jack is delighted to encounter Elinor, who is due to go to Cambridge to study music, and the two leave together. Parsons injures his penis having sex with Clare in the garden and has to be hospitalised, and Chunks has a fright when he thinks that he's given Splodger (the maladjusted younger brother of the alluring Megan) a fatal heart attack when doing 360-degree spins in his Porsche. Elinor's drug-taking exploits and uninhibited dance-floor moves at a nightclub prove too much for Jack, who slips away from the club. Parsons is rescued from a gang of louts in a fast-food joint by Killer Colin, who beats them up single-handedly before persuading Parsons's parents to let him leave home to find his own path in life. Jack finally reads the letter revealing that he hasn't been awarded a grant.

Wrinkles

Spain 2011
Director: Ignacio Ferreras
Certificate 15 89m 16s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Wrinkles is one of those narratives that start out about one character and – as the story unfolds, or sometimes only right at the end – turn out to be about another (*Sunset Blvd*, *Psycho*, *Fargo*). It happens a lot with narrators: he/she tells the story from the sidelines and then, almost without our knowing it, there's a shift and they have *become* the story.

For the most part, *Wrinkles* takes the elderly Emilio's perspective – quite literally in the opening scene, when we are inside a hallucination brought on by his advancing Alzheimer's. What seems to be a consultation between a bank manager and a young couple is in reality – rather than in Emilio's distempered ocular experience – Emilio's son trying to cajole him into eating his soup, and failing. This is a prelude to Emilio's move into a residential home – a frightening experience for the retired widower, who is (at this point) lucid most of the time. He cuts a forlorn figure as he's shown into the room he'll be sharing with the puckish Miguel – an old-timer at the facility who'll not only help Emilio find his feet but also, later, conceal his weakening health from staff. If Miguel can do this, he can inhibit Emilio's transfer to the ominous upstairs, where the fully dependent live out their days in locked-in isolation.

Miguel, unlike Emilio, signed up for this life himself – just as he chose never to raise a family – and will eventually catch up with and outpace Emilio as the centre of the film. But in fact these types of stories are never just about one character 'all along'; rather they are about *both* characters and their interplay from start to finish. *Wrinkles* is an interesting example, because it isn't Emilio's worsening condition or compromised speech and mobility that cause him to lapse into the supporting role and Miguel to push forward in his place: it's Emilio's effect on Miguel, his friendship, that puts the lifeblood in his roommate. Emilio influences Miguel's narrative development.

This is just one of the complexities that gives this animation its layered sophistication. A first feature by *The Illusionist* animator Ignacio Ferreras, *Wrinkles* premiered at San Sebastián in 2011 and comes to the UK redubbed by Martin Sheen (Emilio) and George Coe (Miguel). Adapting from the graphic novel by Paco Roca, which took real anecdotes for its inspiration, Ferreras opts for hand-drawn animation over digital. It's a good fit: the simplicity of the draughtsmanship grounds the film, and the static backgrounds of cel animation seem a metaphor for the boxed-off symmetry of care-home architecture. There's further sophistication in the film's economy, achieved by clever editing and the building into the script of the ellipses in Emilio's experience of time.

But if the animation is accomplished, it's not often arresting. Only a few compositions stick in the mind – notably a sequence in an indoor swimming pool, and a moment of imitative camerawork that sees the lens roll a slow 180-rotation along the white centre-line in the road after a car smash.

The script, however, is hard to fault. There are moments that ring out with real-source truth, as when Emilio, in a gym session, becomes

You & Me Forever

Denmark 2012
Director: Kaspar Munk

Reviewed by Frances Morgan

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The success in the UK of series such as *The Killing* and *Borgen* means that Danish film dramas must work hard to measure up to their small-screen counterparts. With its sombre palette and ostensibly hard-hitting story about teenage sexuality, Kaspar Munk's second feature owes a lot to Scandinavia's TV exports; however, the director could learn a trick or two from them about character development, plot and nuance.

Of course, an 82-minute film is not a 20-episode series, and Munk is working with far more limited resources than such TV productions can command. The most valuable of these is his young cast – primarily Julie Andersen, the star of his 2010 debut *Hold Me Tight*, as central character Laura, but also Emilie Kruse, who gives a tough, moving performance as her rejected friend Christine. Andersen, Kruse and Frederikke Dahl Hansen (as Maria, the interloper who blows Laura and Christine's friendship apart) all bring great energy to the film, inhabiting their characters with a self-aware physicality that feels authentic, whether singing drunkenly on a night bus or flopping around in their bedrooms. By contrast the script often feels overdrawn and portentous, with none of the dextrous chatter and sudden shifts in tone of real adolescence.

The shortest straw in this regard is drawn by Hansen's Maria. The story she sets in motion is one that is presumed to be common in teenage life, in which two best friends are torn apart by the arrival of another, more glamorous and experienced. Here, Maria is the magnetic outsider, offering Laura absinthe, inviting her to her starkly beautiful, parent-free home (Laura, in contrast, lives in a cosy flat with her kind, ordinary mum and dad) and talking incessantly about sex, a subject that Laura is preoccupied with, and fearful of. With Christine sidelined with alarming speed, the new best friends cultivate a passionate, us-against-the-world bond, erotic but never consummated, until Maria's darker side is revealed.



Heavenly creatures: Andersen, Hansen

It's a fantasy that plays on very real teenage fears and fascinations – but it is a young person's fantasy, and Munk's failing here is to indulge it too much. Because Maria seems 'adult' to her peers she is treated as such by the film, given worldly-wise, enigmatic lines to say, and the appearance of agency and control. This feels irresponsible given that Maria's actions frequently hint at damage, possibly childhood trauma and sexual abuse. Her fascination with Laura's sexuality extends to her trying to control it, offering her friend playfully to Jonas and then more seriously to a couple of older men in a club. Laura is intrigued but Maria herself forestalls all these acts at the last minute, and in the film's climax is seen screaming hysterically at one of the men, "Don't touch me! No one touches me!"

Laura – and Munk – abandons Maria at this point, never enquiring why a young girl might pimp out her friend and yet appear horrified by a real sexual encounter. Instead, Laura and Christine are reunited and we never see Maria again. Laura may not care about her friend's past but the viewer has to feel that on some level the director does; otherwise Munk's callousness is simply of a part with Laura's own teenage self-absorption. ☹



Slumpy old men: *Wrinkles*

paralysed with confusion, hearing 'llab' instead of the word 'ball' – and so he cannot pass it, not making the connection. There's none of the operose delicacy you might expect of a film about such a challenging subject. Of his friend Modesto's late-stage Alzheimer's, Miguel says, "We call it 'the Long Goodbye'." Then there's also rhetoric you might well overhear in any old-persons home: "I'm not dead yet, you know." This about sums up the piquant humour of Ferreras's film, which is a rare combination of funny, frightening, tender and universally relevant. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Manuel Cristobal
Oriol Ivern

Script

Ángel de la Cruz
Paco Roca
Ignacio Ferreras
Rosanna Cecchini
Based on the graphic
novel *Arrugas*
by Paco Roca

Director of Photography

David Cubero

Editing

Gemma Gassó

Production Designer

Paco Roca

Music

Nani García

Sound Technician

Javier Ferreiro

Animation Supervisor

Baltasar Pedrosa

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Production Companies
A Manuel Cristobal
production for The
Elephant in the Black

Box, Cromosoma,
Televisión de Galicia
with the participation
of TVE, Televisión
de Galicia, RTW
with the support
of Gobierno de
España, Ministerio
de Cultura,
ICAA - Instituto
de Crédito Oficial,
Agência Galega das
Indústrias Culturais
with the
collaboration of
Audiovisual S.G.R.

Executive Producers

Dani Martínez
María Arochena
Ángel de la Cruz
Tono Folguera
Toni Marín

VOICE CAST

English-language
version
Martin Sheen
Emilio
George Coe
Miguel
Matthew Modine

Juan
Laurie Fraser
Antonia

Spanish-language version

Tacho González
Emilio
Álvaro Guevara
Miguel
Mabel Rivera
Antonia

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[L78:1]

Distributed in
original Spanish
version (with
English subtitles)
and English-
dubbed version

Distributor
Anchor Bay Films

8,034ft +0 frames

Spanish
theatrical title
Arrugas

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Anders Toft Andersen

Script

Kaspar Munk

Storyline

Janrik Tai Mosholt
Kaspar Munk
An idea by Anna
Bro, Kaspar Munk
Director of Photography
Søren Bay
Editors
Nanna Frank Møller
Marlene Billie
Andreasen
Set Designer
Louise Lønborg
Composer
Sara Savery
Sound Design
Peter Albrechtsen
Stylist
Mette Lynggaard

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Danske
Filminstruktører,
Danske Dramatikere,
Filmværkstedet
In co-operation with
DR, Cameo Film,
Volden Pictures
Produced by
Nimbus Film ApS
Executive Producers
Brigitte Hald
Bo Ehrhardt

CAST

Julie Sandra
Brochorst Andersen
Laura
Frederikke Dahl Hansen
Maria
Emilie Claudius Kruse
Christine

Benjamin Wandschneider

Jonas

Allan Hyde

Tobias

Cyron Melville

Mads

Susanne Storm

Carina

Morten Hauch-Fausbøll

Anders

Petrine Agger

Lisbeth

Victoria Carmen Sonne

Sofie

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Day for Night

Suburban Denmark, present day. Sixteen-year-olds Laura and Christine are best friends, inseparable at school. New arrival Maria, a sexually confident girl whose parents are absent, draws Laura's attention away from Christine. The latter is comforted by Jonas, a classmate who lives in an abandoned building. Maria takes Laura to a nightclub where they meet Mads and Tobias, two men in their twenties. At Mads's flat, Maria promises oral sex in return for their cab fare, but she and Laura take the money and run away before carrying out the act. They visit Jonas, and Maria goads him into stripping by offering him sex with Laura, but again the girls walk away. Maria instigates another meeting with Mads and Tobias, inviting them to a boat. The four drink and talk, then Laura and Tobias kiss. Hearing screams from a cabin, they find Maria in hysterics. Mads angrily leaves, revealing that Maria had promised sex with both girls for cash, which Maria confirms. Laura breaks off her friendship with Maria. Meanwhile Jonas and Christine have begun a relationship. Laura visits Tobias and they have sex. She returns to Jonas's squat and collapses, exhausted. Christine comforts her. The three watch from the roof as demolition begins on the building.

Yves Saint Laurent

France/Belgium 2013
Director: Jalil Lespert
Certificate 15 105m 35s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

The problem with approved biographies is the whiff of obligation that hangs over them. This portrait of the legendary designer (played by Comédie-Française hot property Pierre Niney) was made with the full cooperation of Pierre Bergé, Yves Saint Laurent's business and sometime romantic partner, and while it does not shy away from many of the less savoury details of their life together, no amount of sex, drugs and disco debauchery can rid the film of its slightly musty reverence.

Two narrative quirks mark this out as a love letter to the fashion icon rather than a serious attempt to interrogate his legend. The first is the awkward framing device that shows Bergé (Guillaume Gallienne) in 2008, just after Saint Laurent's death, packing away the art collection they amassed together in preparation for an auction: he narrates the action in voiceover in an open declaration that the film will be to some extent authored by the keeper of the Saint Laurent flame. The second is the jarring halt the story judders to in 1976, as if nothing interesting happened between the revelation of Saint Laurent's landmark *Ballets Russes* collection and his death 32 years later. Not only does this emphasise the awkward disconnection between the main narrative and the tacked-on scenes set in 2008, it also presupposes an audience of connoisseurs who will understand that 1976 was the climax, not the end, of Saint Laurent's career. What has gone before – the story of how this fragile, obsessive young man took Paris and the world by storm only to succumb to drugs, misery and career-threatening self-destruction – never quite resolves into a coherent story arc, despite the contrived cut-off point.

Like the stereotypical catwalk model, the film looks ravishing but cultivates a vacant, unthreatening gaze. Still, director Jalil Lespert – better known as a César-winning actor – creates a convincingly high-gloss world and handles the transitions between Paris and north Africa (Saint Laurent grew up in Algeria and later spent much of his time in Morocco), and between the tightly tailored 1950s and the let-it-all-hang-out 1960s, with admirable visual confidence. The costumes (some Saint Laurent originals from the archive, some designed by Madeline Fontaine) are very watchable too. Niney's performance, though, is overwrought and exhausting: a lifelike depiction of the man, maybe, but no more likeable for that. Meanwhile, turns by Charlotte Le Bon, Laura Smet and Marie de Villepin, as the girls who variously inspired and modelled his collections, become interchangeable as they fall in and out of favour with the designer. Their combination of doll-like beauty and disposable characterisation echoes the status of women in this film; the fashion industry may depend on its female clientele for its revenue stream but that doesn't seem to temper its ill-disguised contempt for the women it both serves and controls. Gallienne, on the other hand, emerges as the star of this production. Another luminary of the Comédie-Française (and a director in his own right), he produces a subtle and nuanced depiction of the man who orchestrated and enabled his lover's fame and fortune, only to be rejected for a younger and



Cloth of the titans: Pierre Niney

more handsome piece of arm-candy. Like Saint Laurent himself, the film feels dangerously rudderless when he's not on the scene.

Psychological insights are few and far between, however, and much of the film relies on the hectic pace and heady glamour of the fashion world for its momentum. There's one scene, right at the heart of the film, which seems to sum up the rest. In it, Yves Saint Laurent arranges himself carefully at the edge of the swimming pool of his luxurious Moroccan mansion while a gaggle of models, muses and assorted hangers-on listen to him answering a string of rapid questions about his likes and dislikes. Languorously delivered and lovingly framed, this scene invites the film's audience to join the ranks of Saint Laurent's fascinated fans.

We seem to be expected to yield unquestioningly to his cult-like charisma and creative genius, yet everything else the film has shown us suggests that this is a man whose monstrous ego and emotional ruthlessness are merely dressed up as an all-consuming devotion to his art. Stripped down to his swimming trunks, sequestered in his pretentiously unpretentious retreat, is this supposed to be the 'real' Saint Laurent? If so, we have been cheated: there's nothing there but a hollow husk of cliché-ridden postures.

Perhaps, in a sly way, this apparent hagiography has an iconoclastic undertow: Bergé's last laugh as his fictional avatar oversees the final exposure of his former lover's fashion sorcery as a case of the emperor's new clothes. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Wassim Béji
Yannick Bolloré
Screenplay/
Adaptation/
Dialogue
Marie-Pierre Huster
Jalil Lespert
Jacques Fieschi
Loosely based on the writings of Laurence Benaim
Director of
Photography
Thomas Hardmeier
Editing
François Gédigier
Art Direction
Aline Bonetto

Original Music
Ibrahim Maalouf
Sound
Miguel Rejas
Vincent Guillon
Stéphane Thiebaut
Costume Designer
Madeline Fontaine

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Production
Companies
Wassim Béji presents a WY Productions, SND, Cinefrance 1888, Hérodiade, Umedia co-production

In association with uFund
With the participation of Canal+, OCS
In association with Cofinova 10, Indefilms 2
With the support of the Procirep, CNC (Nouvelles Technologies en Production), the tax shelter of the Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique and the tax shelter investors
Executive Producers
Wassim Béji

Thierry Desmichelle
Lionel Uzan

CAST

Pierre Niney
Yves Saint Laurent
Guillaume Gallienne
Pierre Bergé
Charlotte Le Bon
Victoire Doutreleau
Laura Smet
Loulou de la Falaise
Marie de Villepin
Betty Catroux
Nikolai Kinski
Karl Lagerfeld
Rubean Alves
Fernando Sanchez

Astrid Whettnall
Yvonne de Peyerimhoff
Marianne Basler
Lucienne Saint Laurent
Jean-Edouard Bodziak
Bernard Buffet
Adeline D'Hermey
Anne-Marie Munoz
Xavier Lafitte
Jacques de Bascher
Alexandre Steiger
Jean-Pierre Debord
Philippe Morier-Genoud
Jean Cocteau
Anne Alvaro

Marie-Louise Bousquet

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
El Films

9,502ft +8 frames

An elderly Pierre Bergé looks back on his life with the fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent.

In 1957, at his family's home in Algeria, the young Saint Laurent pursues an obsessive, reclusive existence dedicated to his art. Moving to Paris to take a job with Christian Dior, he is quickly promoted to head designer. However, his mental and emotional frailty soon become apparent and he has a breakdown after being drafted for military service in the Algerian War. The subsequent scandal leads to his dismissal from his job, and he relies heavily on his friend (and

later lover) Bergé, who finds financial backers for an independent Yves Saint Laurent fashion house.

The success of the business makes Saint Laurent rich and famous. Diagnosed with manic depression, however, he self-medicates with drugs and alcohol and leads a debauched and promiscuous lifestyle, much to Pierre's dismay. The couple finally part, though Pierre still runs the business, and even after the designer's death in 2008 continues to preserve his legacy.

The film ends, however, in 1976, with the triumphant unveiling of the designer's *Ballets Russes* collection.

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Home cinema



Biting off more than they can chew: the teenage would-be criminals of *That Sinking Feeling*

BOYS' OWN ADVENTURES

The cinema of Bill Forsyth affectionately celebrates the lure of imaginative escape and improbable teen dreams

THAT SINKING FEELING

UK 1979; BFI Flipside/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 12; 93 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: new audio commentary with Bill Forsyth and Mark Kermode, interview with Robert Buchanan, *Kermode Uncut* (Mark Kermode discusses budget for *That Sinking Feeling* with Bill Forsyth; *KH-4* (John Schorstein, 1969), *Mirror* (John Schorstein, 1970), *Glasgow 1980* (Oscar Marzaroli, 1971), *Islands of the West* (Bill Forsyth, 1972), Bill Forsyth's Bafta acceptance film, optional alternative dubbed dialogue track

GREGORY'S GIRL

UK 1981; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 92/88 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary with Bill Forsyth and Mark Kermode, *Bill Forsyth – The Early Years*, *Gregory's Girl Memories* (interview with Clare Grogan), alternative US audio soundtrack

Reviewed by Edward Lawrenson

One of the first shots of Bill Forsyth's 1979 debut feature *That Sinking Feeling*, newly released on a

dual-format DVD/Blu-ray by the BFI, is a close-up of a puddle, rippled by the steady patter of raindrops. For much of the film's 93-minute running time the downpour is unrelenting, and Forsyth chronicles the inclement extremes of his home city in the winter months with an attentiveness that would make Joris Ivens proud. The sky is grey and heavy. Glasgow's handsome Victorian parks have been turned into muddy fields. Clothes cling to Forsyth's young actors, as if they've just been dunked in the river. It is surely an occasion for misery but from the relative shelter of a wrecked car, abandoned in the middle of one of the city's derelict wastelands, one of the film's teenage protagonists observes brightly: "A good shower really cleans the place up. It really sparkles."

It's a small moment, and a telling one. The drab inconveniences of day-to-day reality are often ignored by the characters who populate Forsyth's best work, from the awkward teenage hero of 1981's *Gregory's Girl* (also on Blu-ray for the first time on Second Sight's new release), pursuing against any credible prospects his crush on a glamorous fellow student, to the Texan oilman of *Local Hero* (1983), who contemplates turning his back on a stressful career for the

quiet life of a Scottish fishing village. Forsyth's films celebrate the romantic lure of imaginative escapes and improbable dreams. It's what lends his work its great charm and delicate melancholy. The lead character of *Local Hero* may long to swap his career for a life of bare-footed beachcombing but it is to corporate Houston that he reluctantly returns by the end of the film.

That Sinking Feeling is broader in tone than Forsyth's later work but it too revolves around well-meaning fantasists, whose whims the director affectionately indulges. Set in Glasgow at a time of real economic blight, the film sees its four penniless teenage heroes respond to the exigencies of unemployment by hatching a plan to rob some stainless-steel sinks from a local warehouse. The plan is pure folly, involving chemical potions and the like, and what emerges is an enjoyably lighthearted crime caper.

The results are, as one might expect from a debut feature, uneven. A subplot that sees two of the boys in the gang dressing as women to distract a credulous security guard feels achingly overextended – despite David Archibald's provocative suggestion, in his excellent introductory essay to the film, that we see the scene in terms of the macho depictions of

Glasgow working-class life that predominated at the time. But mostly Forsyth's comic gifts emerge fully formed. He entices fresh performances from his young cast, and in capturing the interplay between the various gang members reveals a lovely and forgiving appreciation for the foolishness of adolescent males – which is sometimes starkly exposed by the cutting comment or look of a younger girl (anticipating the worldly contributions of the little sister in *Gregory's Girl*). The dialogue has a sideways sophistication and lugubrious charm: Forsyth even manages to provide an incidental detail such as a baker's inventory with a gathering comic force. Playful and irreverent, Forsyth animates *The Sinking Feeling* with a spirit of fly invention. "This is a fairy story," the director tells the critic (and tireless Forsyth champion) Mark Kermode in the BFI set's absorbing and amusing commentary, "not a Ken Loach film".

The commentary also provides a fascinating insight into the making of *That Sinking Feeling*, which at the time was awarded the (probably unverifiable) honour of being the cheapest film ever to receive a theatrical release. The movie's £4,000 budget was raised by Forsyth in what seems to have been a pre-internet forerunner of Kickstarter: collaborating with the Glasgow Youth Theatre, a community project whose teenage participants made up the cast, he wrote begging letters to various local and Scottish firms, asking for contributions. Irm Bru, we learn, turned him down, a refusal that earns the company an unflattering reference towards the end of *That Sinking Feeling*. In an entertaining extra feature included in the BFI package, Forsyth reviews the responses he got, again with Kermode. The paltry sums on offer point to the hardscrabble nature of independent feature filmmaking in the UK at the time. "Rolls – 63 pence," Forsyth observes, reading out the catering expenditure for one day of the shoot. At one point the director produces the film's entire budget, a handwritten scrawl on a single sheet.

Forsyth brings to this interview a nice line in self-deprecation, from which you're tempted to conclude that his debut feature was almost as reckless a venture as the heist dreamed up by his teenage protagonists. He speaks revealingly in the commentary about the limited opportunities for feature filmmaking in Scotland in the late 1970s: funding sources remained in London, and Forsyth had already had his script for *Gregory's Girl* turned down by the British Film Institute (on the grounds that it was "too commercial", a detail that belongs to a bygone era as surely as any of the flares worn by the cast of *That Sinking Feeling*).

But for all Forsyth's professions of modesty, he came to the project with years of experience as a filmmaker, having worked in one of the few viable production outlets in Scotland at the time: sponsored documentaries (under the Films of Scotland umbrella). Included in the BFI release are a number of films he made for corporate or government clients: the 1972 *Islands of the West*, a 30-minute Hebridean travelogue he directed for the Highlands and Islands Development Board, and *Glasgow 1980*, a 1970 film about the



Cops and robbers: *That Sinking Feeling*

redevelopment of the city directed by Oscar Marzaroli and edited by Forsyth. In a short film that Forsyth made in 2009 (also included here), the director refers to the industrial films he made in this period as "glorified magic lantern shows". While the commentary to many of the Films of Scotland titles can be patronising and the images overly illustrative, they clearly offered a valuable apprenticeship to Forsyth. In the 2009 short he talks about the discipline he learnt by cutting films on a hot-splice machine. With strips 'welded together' (the way they once built ships on the Clyde, he reminisces), an editor had to think carefully before making a cut – an approach that must have contributed to the classical economy of *That Sinking Feeling*.

There's a rigour and formal complexity to the two industrial shorts included, which explains why Lynda Myles, who would programme *That Sinking Feeling* during her tenure as director

The drab inconveniences of day-to-day reality are often ignored by the characters who populate Forsyth's best work



Hopelessly devoted: John Gordon Sinclair with Dee Hepburn in *Gregory's Girl*

of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, could legitimately label Forsyth a "structuralist filmmaker". *Islands of the West* is a hauntingly symphonic assembly of seascapes and rural views, and it is shot with a lyricism that looks forward to the gorgeous cinematography of *Comfort and Joy* (1984) and, especially, *Local Hero* (achieved in collaboration with Chris Menges). And Forsyth's lively editing lends pace and dynamism to Marzaroli's beautifully filmed shots of Glasgow, as the town planners bulldoze away the older parts of the city in the name of urban redevelopment.

The strident optimism about the new high-rise tenements then under construction expressed in *Glasgow 1980* now seems naive, given the unhappy outcome of so much of the city's redevelopment. Forsyth and Marzaroli (who documented much of the fast-disappearing Glasgow as a street photographer) are sensitive to the mixed benefits of such large-scale urban change. Those sequences charting the city's dilapidated Victorian buildings have an elegiac grandeur to them that no amount of footage of a building site at Charing Cross (which would become a complex of motorway flyovers) can match. In any event this film – and indeed the rubble-strewn cityscapes that are incidentally documented in *That Sinking Feeling* – is an inescapably poignant glimpse of a city long since vanished.

There is a final poignancy about this splendidly produced package from the BFI (and special credit must go to producer Douglas Weir for the digital restoration, which looked good even on the slightly compressed review disc I had). It's been nearly 15 years since Forsyth's last feature, the underrated *Gregory's Two Girls*. That's an awfully long time. But Forsyth has recently said that he's working on a new screenplay, and I suppose we can hope that the wait is worthwhile, a cause for muted optimism – just like the teenager who finds a reason to celebrate in the gloom of Glasgow downpour. ☺

New releases

DEAD OF NIGHT

Alberto Cavalcanti/Charles Crichton/Basil Dearden/
Robert Hamer; UK 1945; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-
ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 100 minutes; 1.37:1;
Features: *Remembering Dead of Night* featurette,
restoration comparison, stills gallery, trailer

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Screenwriter Angus MacPhail, who was instrumental in weaving together the five stories of this British ur-horror, regarded a film script's ingredients as identical to those of a wedding. For today's viewer, the 'something old' in this peerless Ealing portmanteau piece might be its skilful appropriation of the English ghost-story tradition, and the 'something new' its modish 40s interest in Freudian psychoanalysis.

The 'borrowed' and radically remodelled stories of E.F. Benson and H.G. Wells underpin the time-slip tale 'Hearse Driver' and the blackly comic 'Golfing Story', while the latter's cheerful bridegroom-substitution will pass as 'blue'. (Matthew Sweet believes it may have been cut from the US release partly to avoid shocking a more prudish American audience.).

There's a wealth of these kinds of plum historical, genre or production-specific insights in the weighty featurette accompanying StudioCanal's release. There are also detailed interviews with, among others, Sweet, Kim Newman and Jonathan Romney, which prompt one to reconsider the less famous story segments with greater respect. Hamer's 'Haunted Mirror' and Cavalcanti's 'Ventriloquist's Dummy' pack the largest amount of supernatural melodrama and performance punch (Ralph Michael's highly strung accountant, gradually consumed by a malevolent secret through the looking glass, is as interesting in his own way as Michael Redgrave's lauded disintegration-by-dummy). But Cavalcanti's atmospheric use of space and shadows in the 'Christmas Party' sequence fills it with creepy pleasures, and Charles Crichton's blithe tale of the haunting of a golf cheat is not just a spot of light relief but also a breezy, very English comedy of sexual manners.

Disc: A spiffy, unshowy restoration, which restores the inky shadows and true tones of the original. The featurette is the only substantial extra, though the gallery of on-set stills, with Hugo Fitch (Redgrave's dummy) being primped like any flesh-and-blood thespian, is a nice touch.

THE EALING STUDIOS COLLECTION VOLUME 1

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS/THE LAVENDER HILL MOB/THE MAN IN THE WHITE SUIT

Robert Hamer/Charles Crichton/Alexander Mackendrick;
UK 1949/51/51; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray; 106/81/85
minutes; 1.33:1/1.37:1; Features: audio commentary
with Peter Bradshaw, Terence Davies and Matthew
Guinness (*Kind Hearts*), featurette (*Revisiting The Man
in the White Suit*), introductions (John Landis, Martin
Scorsese), TV interview (T.E.B. Clarke), BBC TV profile of
Dennis Price, BECTU sound interview (Charles Crichton),
BBC Radio 3 essay (*Kind Hearts*), alternative ending
(*Kind Hearts*), restoration comparisons, trailers

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Ealing didn't really do stars. The studio – and studio boss Michael Balcon in particular – reckoned they were spoilt and overpaid,

preferring an informal rep company of character actors who could deliver fine ensemble performances with no grandstanding. But Ealing did have one homegrown star in Alec Guinness, even if he never liked being reminded that this was where he made his name. Whatever his misgivings, Guinness will always be indelibly linked with Ealing comedy, and StudioCanal has made a shrewd choice of three of his most fondly remembered comedies to launch its new series of Blu-ray box-sets.

This trio of films neatly epitomises the three chief strands of Ealing comedy. The 'mainstream' was represented not by a director but by the studio's best-known screenwriter, T.E.B. ('Tibby') Clarke. Clarke's comedy (*Hue and Cry*, *Passport to Pimlico*) was warm and good-natured and his criminals relatively harmless, and his later films, such as *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, declined into cosiness. But *The Lavender Hill Mob* finds Tibby at his ingenious best (the script won him an Oscar), with Guinness sporting a convincing double-chin as the mild bank clerk with larcenous ambitions.

Guinness made his name with his eightfold role as the entire D'Ascoyne clan in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, masterpiece of maverick director Robert Hamer and justifiably reckoned the finest of all British black comedies. But for all Guinness's *tour de force*, the film is held together by Dennis Price as suave serial killer Louis Mazzini, delivering the Wildean wit of the voiceover narration with perfectly judged poise. *Kind Hearts* superbly realises Hamer's intention "of making a picture which paid no regard whatever to established, although not practised, moral convention".

Alexander Mackendrick was the other great Ealing maverick, though luckily less self-destructive than the alcoholic, closet-gay Hamer. *The Man in the White Suit* is the studio's sole political satire, with Guinness's naive genius of a scientist pitted against all the vested interests of British industry, bosses and workers alike, and finally hunted through the streets by a lynch mob. Demonstrating his ideal of comedy as "the snarl behind the grin", Mackendrick slyly skewers every political stance along the spectrum from left to right.

Disc: Previous Ealing box-sets from this source have been on the sparse side as regards extras. This time, though, StudioCanal/Optimum have made up for it: these three films are well served for add-ons, *Kind Hearts*

in particular. And their restoration work, as the comparisons make clear, has achieved wonders: on Blu-ray, Douglas Slocombe's crisp black-and-white cinematography (on all three films) shines forth like new.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

Alfred Hitchcock; USA 1940; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and
Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 120 minutes; 1.37:1; Features:
booklet, 1946 radio adaptation, Hitchcock on *The Dick Cavett
Show*, 1942 *Life* magazine photo-drama by Hitchcock,
featurettes on Hollywood propaganda and special effects

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

After completing *Rebecca* (1940), his first movie in Hollywood and a very successful gothic women's picture/thriller, Alfred Hitchcock plunged into this film for producer Walter Wanger – it's an unwieldy adventure with dashes of propaganda in which a peace-party figurehead (Herbert Marshall) is unmasked as a spy. Though the film's hero Johnny Jones (Joel McCrea) mentions Hitler by name at one point, Hitch was pressed to keep things vague about Germany's involvement in the war. He gets around this by having the chief villain (Eduardo Ciannelli) speak a little nonsense German backwards, and by leaning heavily on German expressionist visuals during a set piece involving a large Dutch windmill.

Foreign Correspondent is solid second-tier Hitchcock, with some famous sequences – a murder during a rainstorm that makes creative use of umbrellas, an extremely exciting climax in which a plane crashes into the ocean – but there are rather pedestrian, hurried interactions among the characters in between. The editing and camera movements during these filler scenes feel distinctly restless, and there are several visual and thematic ideas in the more noted sequences here that would only come to full fruition in Hitch's late masterpiece *North by Northwest* (1959). Robert Benchley provides unfunny comic relief and Laraine Day is a lacklustre leading lady, but the film benefits from the presence of George Sanders, who has one extremely funny *double-entendre* line involving women and firearms.

This is a film to have handy to watch and rewatch the big scenes (particularly the fearsome umbrella murder, when two innocent bystanders are shot) but as a whole it tends to feel lopsided and overstuffed, with uneasy switches in tone.

Disc: A fine transfer buttressed by a very informative talk with author Mark Harris about propaganda films of the time, and a peek into the creation of the elaborate visual effects with effects expert Craig Barron.

MAN IN THE DARK

Lew Landers; USA 1953; Twilight Time/
Region-free DVD; 70 minutes; 1.33:1; Features:
theatrical trailer, 3D on compatible devices

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Man in the Dark is 3D cinema in its primordial phase. If you are a sceptic, you might say that it also represents the sum total of what can be done with the process. The effects are rudimentary and blatant, as obvious as something out of the 'Dr Tongue's 3D House of Stewardesses' skit on the sketch show SCTV. The camera has punches



Material science: *The Man in the White Suit*



DEADLY GAMES

Impossible to pigeonhole, Elio Petri has long been neglected by film fans. Two welcome releases should change that

THE 10TH VICTIM

Italy/France 1965; Shameless/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 92 minutes; 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: interviews (Kim Newman, Paola Petri), stills gallery, reversible lenticular sleeve

INVESTIGATION OF A CITIZEN ABOVE SUSPICION

Italy 1970; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 NTSC DVD Dual Format; 115 minutes; 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: documentaries (*Elio Petri: Notes About a Filmmaker*, *Investigation of a Citizen Named Volonté*, *Music in His Blood*), interviews (Elio Petri, Camilla Zamboni), trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Of all the major Italian directors who came of age creatively in the 1960s, Elio Petri (1929-1982) has been the hardest to pigeonhole (he can be as 'arthouse' as Bernardo Bertolucci and Pier Paolo Pasolini, as 'political' as Gillo Pontecorvo and Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, or as 'genre' as Mario Bava and Sergio Leone) and consequently the easiest to neglect, despite a career that was once recognised by an Oscar and multiple Cannes prizes including the Palme d'Or. Poor UK distribution hasn't helped: until this year Petri's films have been almost entirely ignored by British video labels, aside from an English-dubbed print of his best-known film, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (1970), which emerged on VHS nearly 30 years ago.

Thankfully, things are slowly improving. A German DVD box (Koch Media's *Elio Petri Edition*) unexpectedly offers English subtitles on two of the features (1967's *We Still Kill the Old Way* and 1968's *A Quiet Place in the Country*), while Blu-rays of *Investigation* have been released in the US (Criterion) and Italy (Lucky Red). Arrow recently announced his debut *L'assassino* (1961) for Blu-ray release in May, while Shameless has just put out a dual-format edition of *The 10th Victim* (1965). That still leaves significant gaps, especially his overtly political films from the 1970s (*The Working Class Goes to Heaven*, *Property Is No Longer a Theft*, *Todo modo*), but it's a significant advance on before.

The 10th Victim must have come as a complete shock to those tracking Petri's career from its low-key beginnings. After a trio of black-and-white contemporary dramas focusing on individual existential crises, he unexpectedly switched to dystopian science fiction, turning American writer Robert Sheckley's 1953 short story 'Seventh Victim' into a dayglo-coloured vision of the future. Wars have been abolished in favour of a bizarre competition whose participants alternate as 'hunter' and 'victim', each legally allowed to kill the other provided they're certain of their identities, since innocent victims will earn them a 30-year prison sentence.

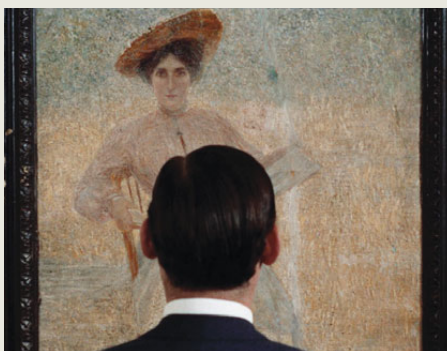


The way of the gun: Ursula Andress in Elio Petri's *The 10th Victim*

The cat-and-mouse games between Marcello Mastroianni's blond Italian playboy and Ursula Andress's American bounty hunter are complicated not merely by a mutual admiration turning into something stronger but also by the demands of sponsors and the media. It's one of cinema's earliest prophecies of modern reality TV, and it's also a clear ancestor of the similar violent gameshows that underpin *Rollerball*, *Death Race 2000* (both 1975), *Battle Royale* (2000) and *The Hunger Games* (2012), although they all owe much to *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932).

Mastroianni gives much the subtler performance but Andress acquits herself as well as anyone could be expected to do given that she's first seen sporting a bra that doubles as a pair of automatic weapons (an image gleefully exploited on Shameless's lenticular cover). Shameless's source print is virtually pristine, but the transfer is marred by digital grain-scrubbing, which

He can be as 'arthouse' as Bernardo Bertolucci, as 'political' as Gillo Pontecorvo and as 'genre' as Mario Bava



Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion

makes everything look slightly waxy – though it proves less of a distraction with this already hyper-artificial film than is often the case.

Although ostensibly a far more realistic drama set in the then present day, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* has a surprising amount in common with the earlier film, notably the central conceit of a brutally violent game with complex rules and wider political ramifications. But here the 'game' is created by the unnamed police chief (Gian Maria Volonté) who in the opening scenes kills his mistress (Florinda Bolkan), deliberately scattering multiple clues that would firmly implicate him, if only his hapless colleagues had the courage to suggest that he might be a viable suspect. The various reasons they don't do so become the film's central thesis: a graphic demonstration of the way those in power operate according to rules that are entirely different from the ones with which they govern/oppress the plebs.

Volonté is on riveting form as a man obsessed with both his (considerable) actual authority and its superficial trappings: when he invites a hapless dupe (regular Petri collaborator Salvo Randone) to scrutinise his appearance in detail for later recall under questioning, he's clearly revelling in the way he's maintaining such meticulous control of his own image. Meanwhile Ennio Morricone's score manages to be both wholly apposite and memorably off-kilter (its various 'boings' being particularly disconcerting at first).

Sourced from the Cineteca di Bologna's recent 4K restoration, Criterion's transfer is all but flawless. There are hours of invaluable extras examining the work of both Petri and his star from numerous angles – although those who are locked to Region B might like to know that the same restoration (if not the supplements, sadly) is available in English-friendly Blu-ray form on Italy's Lucky Red label.

Television

IT'S ALIVE!

Different takes on the Frankenstein story demonstrate how film and television constantly refashion Mary Shelley's infamous creature

FRANKENSTEIN: THE TRUE STORY

Universal/NBC; USA 1973; Second Sight/Region 2 DVD; 181 minutes; Certificate 12; 4:3

FRANKENSTEIN

Hallmark Channel; USA 2004; Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment/Region 2 DVD; 268 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Film versions of Mary Shelley's much adapted *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus*, following 19th-century theatrical versions, have tended to be loose yet have left a permanent stamp on the pop-culture image of the property. Our notion of *Frankenstein* has as much to do with James Whale, Boris Karloff, Terence Fisher, Peter Cushing and Herman Munster. Having appropriately escaped from its creator, *Frankenstein* endures and thrives, though alongside the more fanciful takes on the story there's a run of adaptations that purport to 'go back to the book'. This pair of two-part dramas, made for American television generations apart, sell themselves as authentic to differentiate themselves from *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell*, *Flesh for Frankenstein* or any number of lurid, less-than-respectable spins on the myth.

Directed somewhat flatly by Jack Smight, *Frankenstein: The True Story* was scripted by distinguished partners Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy. It includes more from the novel (notably, a climactic trip to the northern ice floes) than previous serious efforts from Universal or Hammer. However, it also tips in elements from earlier *Frankenstein* films – James Mason's Dr Polidori, named for a hanger-on in the Byron-Shelley ménage, is plainly inspired by Whale's Dr Pretorius from *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and suffers from the burned hands that Peter Cushing sported in several Hammer films – as well as new wrinkles from the writers' whole cloth.

Here, a boyish Frankenstein (Leonard Whiting), the least inspired of the story's three mad scientists, is pulled first into the orbit of the sickly yet visionary Clerval (David McCallum) – who dies before the experiment is complete and whose brain ends up in the skull of the new-made creature (Michael Sarrazin) – and then dominated by the peculiar Polidori. It's a deliberate irony that *Frankenstein* is the name that endures, though Clerval and Polidori are more fixated on fame and posterity.

The film makes a full meal of Whale's queer subtext, with Frankenstein's disapproving fiancée (Nicola Pagett) as horrified by his associations with these perverse fellows as she is by the ungodly nature of their research (she even squashes a reanimated butterfly). A knowing landlady (Agnes Moorehead)

winks as Frankenstein brings a handsome, half-dressed newborn creature to share his rooms.

This resets the story in England and plays up the stuffiness of the society against which the scientists rebel, finds room for a host of distinguished bit-players (Ralph Richardson, John Gielgud, Tom Baker, Margaret Leighton) and seems especially struck by Hammer-style business including baths of acid, living severed arms and the creature crashing into an aristocratic ball. When Polidori chides Frankenstein for hypocrisy, since he embraces (perhaps literally) his monster when he is beautiful but rejects him as he degenerates into a pockmarked grotesque, there seems to be a critique of gay superficiality, which is an unusual theme interestingly teased out of the text. Inspired as much by *Frankenstein Created Woman* as *Bride of Frankenstein*, the strongest stretch of this long haul finds Polidori fashioning a beautiful but soulless female (Jane Seymour, splendidly inhuman) who has an automaton's talent for mimicry, intent on using her to seduce his way into a European power game.

Almost all adaptations of the novel portray the monster as an abused innocent and excuse his murderousness, but this stresses that these unique creatures exist outside morality and shows how cruel they become. It's Shelley's point, but too uncomfortable for most films. For this alone, *Frankenstein: The True Story* is worth inclusion in the *Frankenstein* pantheon, though felicities of writing, performance and plot trickery also make it intermittently distinguished.

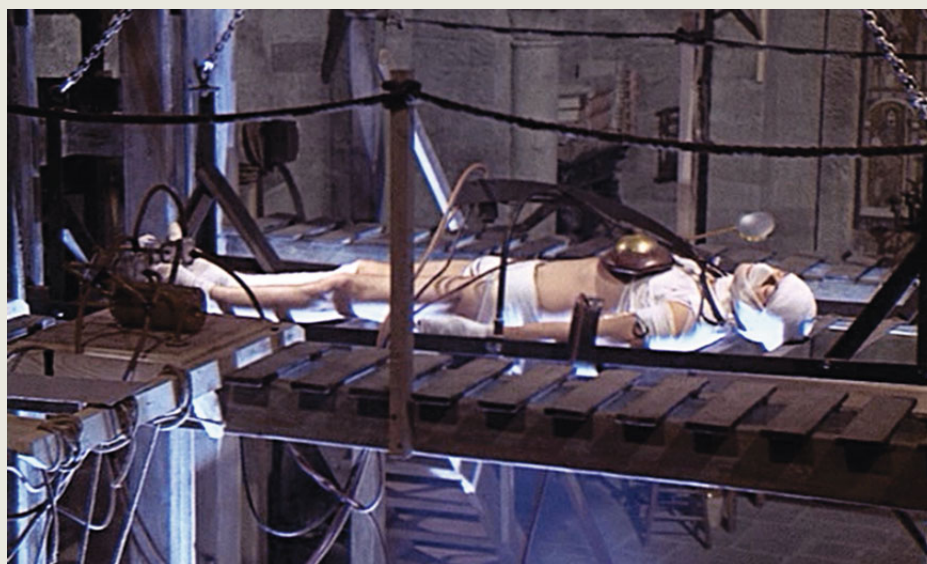
A complaint made against *Frankenstein: The True Story* – and other adaptations that make a

Our notion of 'Frankenstein' has as much to do with James Whale, Boris Karloff, Peter Cushing and Herman Munster

fuss about fidelity, notably Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* – is that it doesn't deliver what it promises: an adaptation of the novel that hews to Shelley's plot and cast of characters. By contrast the Hallmark Channel's two-part 2004 *Frankenstein*, directed by Amicus old hand Kevin Connor and scripted by Mark Kruger (*Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh*), can lay claim to be the single most faithful mounting of the text ever attempted, adopting the structure of the novel as *Frankenstein* (Alec Newman) tells his sorry story to an Arctic explorer (Donald Sutherland) after he has been led to the ends of the earth by his vengeful outcast creation (Luke Goss). Though it sticks closely to Shelley's plot, this tweaks its characters to make them more sympathetic (and less interesting), muting crucial moments such as the scientist's rejection of his new-made creature (the point at which Frankenstein really creates a monster).

Otherwise, it's typical Hallmark television: carefully crafted, clever in its use of Slovakia to pass for Switzerland, Germany and the Arctic Circle, and with a 'quality' feel that still doesn't keep it from dragging. Julie Delpy is prominently billed as Frankenstein's mother but dies before he even goes off to college, while William Hurt does a Mel Brooksian German accent as Frankenstein's supposedly charismatic teacher. Set pieces that even Branagh made something of – the creation scene, Frankenstein toiling on the making of the bride – are almost thrown away as the film tries hard not to be terrifying or exciting or inspirational.

Goss isn't sufficiently grotesque to make even fundamentally good people reject him on sight (an important plot point) but is an acceptable, whispery presence. However, like Newman, he struggles with a script that hits all the story beats but won't let either Frankenstein or his Monster show the extreme darks that make them great characters in the first place. ☹



Reanimating a classic: *Frankenstein: The True Story*

New releases

and flowerpots thrown at it; revolvers, surgical instruments and a lighted cigar are poked towards it; and it is finally taken for a climactic rear-projection rollercoaster ride.

An 11-day wonder dashed off to exploit the then fresh novelty of the new technology, this *noir* from fast-and-shoddy Lew Landers was the first 3D offering from a major studio. It begins as career criminal Steve Rawley (Edmond O'Brien) is prepared for experimental surgery, a partial lobotomy intended to cure his criminal impulses and make his mind a *tabula rasa*. O'Brien, absolutely poured into a sweater vest, was one of the more lumpy, homely guys to take leading roles – oddly, the film calls for his character to do a great deal of acrobatic climbing, usually viewed from a conveniently obscuring distance. O'Brien is a shimmering Adonis, however, compared with the trio of ex-partners (Ted de Corsia, Horace McMahon and pint-sized Belmondo Nick Dennis) who kidnap him and try to jog his memory as to where he hid the ill-gotten gains of their last big job, as his former life of crime is viewed in interstitial flashbacks.

The rollercoaster scene was shot at LA's Pacific Ocean Park pier, while the rest of the film unfolds on mismatched, cardboard-flimsy cityscape sets. Landers rouses himself from his customary prosaic indifference to put together a patently silly pier-set dream sequence that makes creative use of a spinning teacup ride.

More interesting than Steve racking his brain to find his lost loot, though, are the glimpses of domestic misery that lurk on the fringes of the film. "Whaddya do when you hate yourself?" Steve's one-time moll (Audrey Totter) asks a bartender, who responds: "I usually take it out on my wife." As *Man in the Dark* ends, she and Steve are finally reunited – proving that the key to lasting love is amnesia.

Disc: A flawless transfer – and the theatrical trailer is an amusing piece of ballyhoo for 3D. ("Man in the Dark is one of the most sensational thriller movies ever brought to the screen... Its startling story was especially appropriate to three dimensions...")

MANY WARS AGO

Francesco Rosi; Italy 1970; Rarovideo/Region A Blu-ray; 101 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: restoration documentary, new interview with Francesco Rosi, essay booklet

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Sweaty, tense and alive to suffering, *Many Wars Ago* (*Uomini contro*) is a long-forgotten, long-unrestored essential WWI saga, and as paradigmatic of that war's particular class dynamics as Lewis Milestone's version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), Raymond Bernard's *Wooden Crosses* (1932), Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957), Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981) and Bertrand Tavernier's *Capitaine Conan* (1996).

The narrative, co-scripted by Tonino Guerra from a memoir by Emilio Lussu, follows the aimless and absurd trajectory of an Italian infantry division as it faces impossible odds against Austrian forces and a maniacal iron-ass of a general (Alain Cuny) doggedly keeping faith with Old World war-making methods and prone to executing 'cowards' on the spot. The air of do-your-own-thing despair that infects



Pop psychology: *Phantom of the Paradise*

the characters (primarily Antonioni discovery Mark Frechette and veteran powerhouse Gian Maria Volonté) is distinctively Vietnam-era, and suggests that these two wars have far more in common, at least for the average disillusioned soldier, than either did with the big lollapalooza of 1939-45. Here, perhaps even more archetypally than in the 60s, fragging (killing) incompetent officers was an inevitable option.

Rosi's fascinated, career-long intercourse with 20th-century Italian history may be his epic *oeuvre's* trump card, and here it plays out with a sense of physical authenticity and an eye for outrageous iconography, including a battle that Cuny's general insists be haplessly waged by troops trapped in antique giant tin-can armour-helmets, rendering them largely helpless and blind. If movie-WWII is a vast battle against maniacal war-machine evil, and the movie-Vietnam War is a soul-destroying boondoggle-in-the-jungle, then movie-WWI is a continental folly predicated on the stupefying conflict between 19th-century war-making habits and the merciless feed-the-grinder technological reality of 1915.

Thus, WWI movies such as *Many Wars Ago* are almost by contextual definition radically class-aware, and Rosi is alive to how in the trench-scarred, ashen, no-man's-land warscape itself the realisation dawned that aristocracies and governments and military cabals are corrupt, untrustworthy, self-serving and carelessly malevolent. As the liberal idealist disillusioned by his command's fanatical inflexibility and cruelty, Frechette (a placid pretty-boy rebel who, after snagging the lead in *Zabriskie Point*, famously made only this and one other film before dying in prison) withers in the presence of Volonté and Cuny, but the vast ensemble, the scarred *Mitteuropa* they trudge through and the mechanisms of wartime injustice and class atrocity are vivid and haunting.

Disc: On Blu-ray, the digital restoration is evergreen, and Rosi's interview insightful. The accompanying booklet does all it should – aggregate a variety of documentation and criticism, including director's statements, original critical responses, retrospective film scholars' assessments and crew members' remembrances, creating an expansive view of the neglected film's various contexts.

PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE

Brian De Palma; USA 1974; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray; 92 minutes; 2.35:1. Features: isolated music and effects track, documentary *Paradise Regained*, Paul Williams interviewed by Guillermo del Toro, video essay *The Swan Song Fiasco*, archive interview with costume designer Rosanna Norton, stills gallery, alternative takes and bloopers, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by David Thompson

Made after *Sisters* (1973) had given Brian De Palma out of the underground/indie world some degree of commercial success, *Phantom of the Paradise* failed to find a wide audience on first release but has gone on to gain in popularity on the shelf marked 'cult'. A rock 'n' roll fantasy drama that dares to mix together *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Faust* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, all to songs by MOR-anthem champion Paul Williams, the film was regularly double-billed with its close relation *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), which conveniently for cinemas was also distributed by 20th Century Fox.

Rocky Horror's creator Richard O'Brien went for extreme camp in his marriage of gothic horror cliché with retro pop pastiche, and his film rarely transcended its stage origins. *Phantom* is far more of a cinematic ride, incorporating De Palma's favourite games of voyeurism, split screens and stylistic excess, all to the purpose of satirising the corruption and human exploitation rife in the world of pop music and television.

In fact, it's been argued by those involved that in biting the hand that feeds the industry, the film failed to appeal to a teenage audience. *Phantom* is perhaps too sophisticated in its ideas but too safe in its own music to be entirely satisfying. The energy of the direction and the performances hugely compensate. Neurotic singer-composer Winslow Leach (William Finley) has his rock cantata based on the Faust legend stolen by reclusive rock producer Swan (Paul Williams, in a role based on Phil Spector). Leach is dispatched to prison, escapes to have his face burned in a record press, and in his menacing guise as 'The Phantom' reluctantly agrees to work with Swan so that his songs can be performed by their new singing discovery Phoenix. The latter role is taken by the enchanting Jessica Harper, who won the part over Linda Ronstadt and whose subsequent appearances in *Inserts* (1974), *Suspense* (1977) and *Stardust Memories* (1980) enshrined her as a cult actress.

As revealed in the bonus material, *Phantom* fell foul of several serious legal complaints, necessitating the addition of the words "of the Paradise" to the original title and the removal of virtually all visible logos saying "Swan Song", as the brand name had already been taken for the then new record label belonging to Led Zeppelin. That band's fearsome manager Peter Grant also took particular exception to a scene showing the electrocution on stage of a rock performer, as the lead guitarist of Stone the Crows (whom he managed) had suffered a similar fate in 1972. Fortunately Grant was unable to have the scene cut from the film, as that would have seriously harmed De Palma's tight structure and deprived us of one of the film's most delirious sequences.

Disc: A vibrant, punchy transfer with excellent sound. The informative and amusing 'making of' documentary is lifted from

Television

JACK THE RIPPER

Euston Films/Lorimar/ITV; UK 1988; WVG Medien/Region B Blu-ray; 217 minutes; 16:9; Features: audio commentary, outtakes from Barry Foster version, TV featurette

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Launched on a huge wave of publicity on the centenary of the Whitechapel murders, this glossy big-budget Anglo-American co-production stars Michael Caine as a choleric and alcoholic Inspector Abberline, contrasting with Lewis Collins's more subdued interpretation of George Godley, his sergeant. Armand Assante as stage actor Richard Mansfield is given far too much prominence for a mere red herring, while Jane Seymour is largely wasted in a fictional supporting role (presumably both were cast as faces recognisable to the US backers).

Brash, vulgar and overlong, this is often thoroughly entertaining in its own sub-Hammer way. Despite opening disclaimers to the contrary, the project does play fast and loose with historical facts – not surprisingly perhaps, given its genesis in a bizarre earlier project by its writer-producer-director David Wickes in which the Ripper case was investigated by Stratford Johns and Frank Windsor in their roles of Barlow and Watt from *Z Cars*.

Disc: This English-friendly German Blu-ray crops the top and bottom of the image and opens up the sides slightly to create a faux widescreen version, with colours that look occasionally washed-out. The audio commentary (ported over from an old DVD release) features Wickes, researcher Sue Davies and moderator Jonathan Southcott and is full of fascinating (if rarely screen-specific) detail, the trio rarely pausing for breath despite the three-hour-plus running time. Footage from an early version starring Barry Foster, abandoned when extra US funds made it possible to cast Caine, provide a rare view of what might have been.

THE MISTRESS

BBC; UK 1985-87; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 341 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Prettily shot on location in Bath, this adult comedy from Carla Lane can be seen as a sort of mélange of her melancholy classic *Butterflies* (1978-83), with its unconsummated adultery subplot, and *Solo* (1981-82), her previous collaboration with Felicity Kendal, about a woman looking to make it as a singleton. Here Kendal is Maxine, a businesswoman who has to share her lover Luke (played initially by Jack Galloway) with his wife (Jane Asher), who is unaware of his double life. There is an inevitable pattern of assignation, recrimination, guilt and reconciliation to most episodes, buoyed by Lane's trademark caustic humour and an overall tone of mild resignation, with occasional *Butterflies*-style kitchen disasters ("Even the gravy is having an identity crisis!") to liven things up. However, repetition sets in fast and the best episode from the first series is notable precisely for departing from the formula by having its secret lovers failing to meet, instead following their separate activities for a full half-hour until a concluding clinch in the final minute.

Perhaps sensing that the premise was too hermetic for popular success, the second



The Mistress There is an inevitable pattern of assignation, recrimination and guilt to most episodes, buoyed by Carla Lane's trademark caustic humour

season made several cast changes (including the recasting of Luke, now played by Peter McEnery) and expanded Asher's role by having her find out about the affair. The second series concludes on a major cliffhanger but sadly was left in limbo when the show was discontinued.

Disc: The then-standard mixture of tape (studio) and 16mm film (location) is presented impeccably on disc. There are no extras.

NICHOLS

USA 1971-72; Warner Archive Collection/Region 0 DVD; 1,225 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Kim Newman

This one-season (1971-72) western brought James Garner back to television and to the genre that had made him a star in *Maverick*, but it was too eccentric to survive; many of the creative personnel carried on to Garner's long-lasting hit *The Rockford Files*.

Inspired by Garner's turn in *Support Your Local Sheriff* – with some of the end-of-the-west feel of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* or *The Wild Bunch* – it's set in a fast-changing 1914. Having witnessed a demonstration of a machine gun, cavalryman Nichols (Garner) quits the army to return to the town his family founded. Local matriarch Ma Ketcham (Neva Patterson) persuades him to become sheriff – though he prefers not to carry a gun and gets around not on a horse but on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

Like *Rockford*, the show uses its simple premise to tell a variety of stories, built around an eccentric guest cast (Strother Martin, Jack

Elam, Ricardo Montalban, Tom Skerritt, Paul Winfield, Joyce Van Patten, Bo Hopkins) or crazes that suggest the beginnings of modern times (baseball, flying, serial murder). Nichols drifts into a relationship with free-spirit bartender Ruthie, played as a proto-hippie chick by a very winning Margot Kidder – who adopts more modest dress in later episodes, suggesting network interference.

Like *Alias Smith and Jones*, which was a hit, it daringly presents a non-violent hero and struggles to go against shoot-'em-up conventions. Some episodes are concerned with humorous scams – Stuart Margolin, later Rockford's weaselly informant, is funny as Nichols's dim, resentful deputy – while others deal with social ills (a black chef persecuted by a white ex-con who resents his success) or the tragic consequences of the myth of the Wild West (a drunken old-timer always telling stories about his exploits is egged on by bar buddies into actually gunning down a long-time enemy). This pays off with 'All in the Family', one of the most extraordinary hours of American television – a final episode only a cancelled show could manage. Nichols's easygoing treatment of a troublemaker (Anthony Zerbe) gets the hero shot dead before the credits but – in a *High Plains Drifter*-ish twist – a tougher, more deadly Garner (claiming to be the dead man's twin brother) shows up not for revenge but to shame the town into doing the right thing.

Disc: This Warner Archives DVD offers no extras but at last makes available a show that has been little seen since its airing (and never shown in the UK).

New releases

the recent French edition, and still carries credits such as “*chansons et paroles*” and Gerrit Graham’s awkward attempts to speak the language. The lengthy Williams/del Toro fanboy meeting is amusing but adds little to what the composer says in the documentary.

ROMA

Federico Fellini; Italy 1972; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 128 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: introduction by Chris Wagstaff, deleted scenes, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

At one point during his filming of this ramshackle tribute to his adopted city, Fellini is confronted by a bunch of earnest young students who tell him they don’t want to see “the same old colourful Rome, easygoing and messy”. But of course that’s exactly what they – and we – get. *Roma* isn’t a documentary, though from time to time it masquerades as one; it’s hardly a feature film, as there’s no plot to speak of; and to call it a filmed essay would suggest something far too rigorous. Fellini himself described it to his understandably apprehensive producer as “a Sunday film”, something that he could go and make as and when he felt like it. Not surprisingly, the shooting of *Roma* dragged on over some 14 months, during which time one of its backers went bankrupt.

It’s a film of disparate sections, run together without much concern for logic or continuity. There’s a chunk of heavily fictionalised autobiography, recycling elements of *I vitelloni* and *8½* (and anticipating *Amarcord*); there’s the pseudo-doc, with Fellini on a camera-crane seemingly shooting a chaotic slew of people, vehicles, horses, handcarts and conflagrations on the motorway circling the city (except that it was all shot on a length of reconstructed motorway at Cinecittà); there are German journalists on a guided tour of the half-excavated metro, viewing newly unearthed ancient Roman frescoes; there are (inevitably) grotesque ageing hookers, street artists, third-rate music-hall acts, priests, bikers and cops; there’s copious eating and drinking, accompanied by raucous dialogue; and there are cameos from Gore Vidal, Anna Magnani, Alberto Sordi and Marcello Mastroianni (the latter two in deleted scenes), all playing themselves.

And by way of culmination we get Fellini at his most mockingly, extravagantly baroque, with an ecclesiastical fashion show mounted at the palazzo of an ageing *principessa*, with a cardinal as guest of honour. Starting as if the Vatican had engaged David Bowie and Prince as joint fashion consultants, it turns increasingly sinister.

Disc: This is the international version of the film, for which Fellini truncated some scenes and cut others entirely. The excised footage, its colour rather faded, shows up in the deleted scenes.

SEVEN SAMURAI

Kurosawa Akira; Japan 1954; BFI/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 207 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: Tony Rayns discussion, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

This was only the third of Kurosawa’s films to be released in Britain, and it came three years after a 1952 double-header of *Rashomon* (1950) and *They Who Step on the Tiger’s Tail* (1945), when Japanese cinema *in toto* was still a decidedly rare



Scarlet woman: Britta Barnes in Federico Fellini’s *Roma*

breed. Contemporary evidence suggests that it stunned us from the start: exactly 59 years ago in these pages, future director Tony Richardson recognised its Shakespearean qualities (presciently, since Kurosawa had yet to adapt the Bard), comparing Mifune Toshiro’s would-be samurai Kikuchiyo with Falstaff and praising Kurosawa as “a virtuoso exponent of every technique of suspense, surprise, excitement, and in this he gives nothing to his Western masters”.

Today, despite our far greater awareness of the cultural context and an almost limitless number of period martial-arts epics as alternative viewing choices (many directly influenced by Kurosawa’s film), the original immediacy remains surprisingly undimmed. Although the disc under review has the option to play it with or without an intermission, it must be one of the ‘shortest’ three-and-a-half-hour films ever made. It’s set almost entirely in and around a small village whose inhabitants hire a band of samurai to defend them from marauding bandits. Kurosawa uses the time at his disposal to explore the milieu from every perspective, from the straightforwardly geographical to the more intricately sociological, whether it’s the class stratifications between peasant and samurai (and within the samurai group itself) or questions of appropriate behaviour – how does one approach a samurai to strike a business deal in the first place, especially if the ‘fee’ comprises rice rather than money? And all this wealth of detail is regularly interspersed with action scenes that make the pulse race even on the umpteenth viewing. Kurosawa’s understanding of the dramatic value of sudden stillness was rarely put to better use than here.

Disc: With its marginally superior transfer and plethora of extras, Criterion’s 2010 two-disc release remains the definitive Blu-ray edition but it’s locked to Region A and costs half as much again. Which makes this BFI release a more than acceptable alternative, offering a solid presentation of the main feature and an engrossing 49-minute discussion of Kurosawa’s career by the ever-reliable Tony Rayns, who does a particularly good job of placing the film in its original Japanese cultural context.

THIS IS NOT A DREAM

Gavin Butt and Ben Walters; UK 2011; Performance Matters/Region 0 DVD; 119 minutes; Features: bonus chapter, booklet

Reviewed by Alex Davidson

Gavin Butt and Ben Walters’s film documents the impact of the 1970s video revolution on queer artists, from outsiders finding a voice on obscure cable channels to the YouTube stars of today. The recycling of slices of popular culture to ‘talk back’ to the mainstream is a recurring theme, represented through Dara Birnbaum’s marvellous *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978-79), an ingenious feminist repurposing of the cult show. The queer infiltration into popular television also includes exhibitionist Nao Bustamante appearing in character on *The Joan Rivers Show* and video artist Kalup Linzy managing to secure screen time with James Franco in a bizarre episode of *General Hospital*.

The talking heads are generally terrific, unsurprisingly given that the majority are professional performers. Regulars at the South London gay/performance venue the Royal Vauxhall Tavern bulk out many of the later interviews – David Hoyle, recounting his tenure as the Divine David on Channel 4 (“when Channel 4 really was Channel 4”), and the engagingly puckish one-man-pantomime Alp Haydar are especially revealing.

The influences of pioneering queer experimental filmmakers such as Andy Warhol and Jack Smith are referenced throughout, while the brazen poaching of uncensored film and television in many of the artists’ work hopefully predicts a loosening of rights regulations for future practitioners. As Birnbaum wryly notes, although her film has been shared without permission across the internet, she is hardly in a position to protest given her initial ‘borrowing’ of *Wonder Woman*.

Best of all are the newly filmed performance pieces from Dickie Beau, who reimagines three monologues and transforms them through drag and lip-synch into arresting works. The last, based around an Orson Welles interview, is incredibly moving.

Disc: Excellent booklet with directors’ essay and production details.



Absolute trust: Sally Potter (above, on the set of *Orlando*) seeks to show that the relationship between an actor and a director is one of mutual exposure

THE LOOK OF LOVE

NAKED CINEMA

Working with Actors

By Sally Potter, Faber & Faber, 422pp, £22, ISBN 9780571304998

Reviewed by Nick James

Naked Cinema might seem a sensational title for a practical guide to one of the most elusive parts of the filmmaking process – the director-actor relationship – but it is entirely apt. As Sally Potter – director of *The Gold Diggers*, *Orlando*, *The Tango Lesson*, *The Man Who Cried*, *Yes, Rage* and *Ginger & Rosa* – is determined to demonstrate here, that relationship is all about mutual exposure: “You have to be the person who is holding the actor, psychically and emotionally, understanding their process and respecting it. You have to act unafraid and show yourself willing to go to the limits with them.”

So honest and thorough is Potter's approach that it calls for similar candour from a reviewer. *Naked Cinema* is aimed primarily at young, aspiring directors. This reviewer is not young and has never directed a film but like most

critics I have often imagined myself in that position. Having absorbed the obvious practical tips many times, what fascinates me are filmmaking's more ineffable elements: the fluid, intuitive aspects, of which the actor-director relationship is probably the hardest to pin down.

Happily *Naked Cinema*'s principal virtue is clarity. Potter is fierce in her employment of plain words – you *will* understand what she's explaining. When Potter says, “Learning how to ‘read’ what the camera is seeing and recording, rather than just what you ‘feel’ experientially at the moment of shooting, comes from experience,” it does not feel like an offputting ‘come-back-when-you're-one-of-us’ remark. It's rather part of an opening on to a vast field of experience, a persuasive, cogent analysis of how to behave when you're trying to draw out “the actor's ability to be truly present at the moment of shooting; to arrive in the here and now at the word ‘action.’”

The book is divided into four parts: ‘preparation’, ‘the shoot’, ‘post-production’ and ‘interviews’. That last part – Potter's personal quizzing of actors she's worked with – takes up nearly two-thirds of the book and offers the useful pleasures of amenable, open discussion. You get

the wisdom of Annette Bening, Steve Buscemi, Judi Dench, Jude Law and Timothy Spall, among others – actors delighted to talk about their craft with someone who, for once, knows what they're talking about. Potter receives their praise a lot too, though these perhaps egregious moments of reflected glory act as a counterbalance to the self-deprecation Potter heaps on herself in the earlier, instructional parts. One becomes aware also that these actors often repeat and bolster what Potter has already said, but there are plenty of original asides, such as Simon Abkarian's insistence that, “Characters do not exist, writing exists,” or Spall's observation about his kind that, “We're frightened babies. Frightened but very clever babies.”

Being so bound up with the establishing and conducting of a relationship that, Potter says, “can become extraordinarily passionate; a type of love affair with the process... I call it ‘falling in work’,” the practical filmmaking chapters do occasionally have the quality of a self-help manual. In the ‘What to do with a diva’ chapter, Potter says, “I have learnt to be wary of creating expectations that I can ‘take anything’.” True respect is not the same as phoney pandering to insulting or destructive behaviour. Above all I have found

that... what you give is what you will get." Such near-platitudes are rare in what is otherwise a cornucopia of good advice, with much of it focused on the difficulty of helping actors to feel, as Abkarian has it, "king or queen of the space".

Potter is most keen to demonstrate how vital preparation is, and it rapidly becomes clear how crucial conversations, readings and rehearsals with actors – the period before the tyranny of shoot time – are to her own process. She has thought intensely about how a director can initiate the relationship with an actor, how to maintain it during the frantic hubbub of the shoot and how best to troubleshoot with sensitivity when performance problems arise. And she's astute enough to know that actors are a various breed, so she has a range of solutions to suit different personalities.

But the essence of Potter's approach is looking: "If you watch carefully," she says, "you will see when he or she comes alive and when he or she closes down. You will notice what gives energy and what seems to take it away. You can observe when an actor becomes anxious and take note of your own anxieties when they arise."

Naked Cinema is a large book and sometimes, in her eagerness to make herself clear, Potter

The director has to be the person holding the actor, psychically and emotionally, understanding their process and respecting it

reiterates exhaustively points made earlier. Yet the great thing about her having such a forceful explanatory style – aided by double-spacing and generous margins – is that you can race through the book quickly to the relevant part, especially if you mark it up for personal use.

If I were fortunate enough to begin casting a fiction film tomorrow, *Naked Cinema* would be close to my hand. The good advice goes beyond actor relations. Potter, it seems, feels duty-bound to cover every millimetre of her ground. Her efforts to be forensic do not, however, read like a scientific manual. The same bright, insistent personality you feel present in her films also imbues these pages. In that sense it's a very passionate, determined, human document from someone whose pride in her craft is palpable. It's nothing like the dull, formulaic, uninspiring screenwriting manuals that seem never to cease disgorging themselves on to publishing schedules.

The last page before the actor interviews is dedicated to Potter's pin-sharp 'Barefoot Manifesto', a summation of her credo. I like particularly points 1) "The best time to start is now (don't wait)", and 3) "Don't blame anyone or anything (including yourself)." If Alexander Mackendrick's *On Film-Making* remains the best guide to matters of script, structure and shot-listing, when it comes to studies of directing actors, nothing I've seen feels as insightful as *Naked Cinema*. "Keep your head, trust your gut, and honour your role." 📖

IT DOESN'T SUCK: SHOWGIRLS

By Adam Nayman, ECW Press/Pop Classics, 196pp, £7.85 ISBN 9781770411746

Reviewed by Ben Walters

Hollywood has rarely been good with vulgarity. It's great *at* vulgarity but seldom able to engage with vulgar subject matter – especially sex, sex work and lowbrow entertainment – without coming off as prurient, moralistic or tin-eared. Perhaps there's a sense that it's too close to home, that to acknowledge how interesting the crude and tasteless can be is to appear crude and tasteless. Such was the fate of *Showgirls* (1995).

Directed by Paul Verhoeven and written by Joe Eszterhas, *Showgirls* was the *All About Eve* of big-budget Vegas erotica, starring Elizabeth Berkley as hungry, angry up-and-comer Nomi and Gina Gershon as languid established star Cristal. It was meant to be one type of *succès de scandale*, ushering in an era of explicit yet credible NC-17-certificated pictures, but proved to be another, becoming the most notorious cinematic disaster in a generation, smothering Berkley's Hollywood career at birth and scuppering Verhoeven's.

Vulgarity is to *Showgirls* as water is to fish. An ugly story about tawdry glamour, it luxuriates in and sometimes abets the moral and aesthetic squalor of its milieu; this was sufficient to damn it *prima facie* on its release. But it's also an extremely clever, assured enterprise, a film that simultaneously invites and abhors our complicity as it mischievously anatomises the inescapably dehumanising effects of life under capitalism. Every personal interaction here is a negotiated transaction between interested parties: *Showgirls* is Homo economicus in a G-string and it's not a pretty sight. But that's the point.

Over the past decade, the film has enjoyed a degree of critical reappraisal, the latest instance being *It Doesn't Suck*, a witty and insightful monograph by Toronto-based critic and academic

Adam Nayman that assures us, "It's finally okay to stop worrying and love the bomb." Taking Nomi's mantra as his book's title, Nayman handily confirms that *Showgirls* doesn't suck, cannily identifying Verhoeven as a "provoc-auteur" and his movie as a "masterpiece of shit" whose genius is intractably bound to its tackiness. Yet though he robustly defends the picture against denigration, Nayman doesn't make a cohesive, compelling case for its unique satirical power; acknowledging only parody of the entertainment industry, he neglects the movie's provocatively unsettling universality. So while *It Doesn't Suck* doesn't suck, neither (to quote another line from the film) is it "better than a ten-inch dick".

The book takes a conventional approach, locating *Showgirls* within Verhoeven's career and setting out its production history and reception, before embarking on a scene-by-scene tour of the picture. It's a limiting approach but done well. Nayman shrewdly analyses the film's motifs and *mise en scène* (notably its use of doubling and reflections) and fruitfully glances back at classical musicals and sideways at *Eyes Wide Shut* and *Mulholland Dr.* His style is easy, entertaining and often catty – "for those of us keeping count, [this is Nomi's] fifth furious exit of the film" – but occasionally trips over a distended metaphor ("a knowing wink beneath a furrowed brow"?).

Nayman astutely characterises Verhoeven as a picaresque figure who tells picaresque tales, and identifies Berkley with her naive, ambitious character. Yet Nomi's weirdness is more telling than he allows. "Whenever Nomi dances, she seems to be having sex, and whenever she has sex she seems to be dancing," he notes at one point; elsewhere, he observes in passing her "violent, impulsive gestures" and the way her body can seem weaponised. But not to knit together the seductive and the combative – the trashy and the thrashy – misses the core of the film. Nomi is always dancing and fucking and trading and fighting, all at once, forever girding herself in the mad put-upon crouch of the human under capitalism. Ludicrous as she is, Nomi is us. 📖



Homo economicus in a G-string: Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls*

FOSSE

By Sam Wasson, Eamon Dolan, 723pp, \$32 hardback, ISBN 9780547553290 / £16.95 paperback ISBN 9780544334618

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Fosse, the new biography of the dancer, choreographer and director of stage and screen Bob Fosse, begins at the end, at the point on which the death-obsessed Fosse was fixated throughout his frantic life. Author Sam Wasson recreates the scene at New York's Tavern on the Green at a party thrown in Fosse's memory. This was 30 October 1987, just over a month after Fosse had died of a heart attack, aged 60, on the evening that a revival of his *Sweet Charity* was set to open after his usual down-to-the-wire rehearsals. It's a neat little set piece that hints at the depths of Wasson's research, and showcases the sort of easy storytelling that can only be arrived at with enormous effort and a gift for singling out the apposite detail that places the reader in the middle of a scene. It's an entrance that sets you right at ease, lets you know that you're in good hands.

Wasson's previous works include a book of interviews with Paul Mazursky, a critical biography of Blake Edwards and an in-depth study of Edwards's most famous film: *Fifth Avenue, 5 A.M.: Audrey Hepburn, Breakfast at Tiffany's, and The Dawn of the Modern Woman*. His latest title is less of a mouthful, but *Fosse* exceeds in grasp and scope any of Wasson's previous undertakings. It is a major work of entertainment biography, a massive career excavation handled with moxie.

The book's epigraph, a quote from Fosse, reads: "How much time do I have?" This question is answered by each chapter heading, which counts down what remains of Fosse's life, from 'Sixty years' to 'One hour and fifty-three minutes'. Wasson begins in Fosse's native Chicago, where the dancing prodigy becomes a breadwinner early on as half of a teenage tap team, The Riff Brothers, working the city's burlesque joints. As depicted in Fosse's autobiographical *All That Jazz* (1979), he was pawed and molested by the strippers, a fact on which he would blame much of his later fear of intimacy and his serial philandering – while his mature dance style owes much to an early acquaintance with bump-and-grind.

From Chicago to *Chicago*, Wasson charts the development of the Fosse style in detail, as well as the process whereby a star choreographer-cum-movie director absorbed the whole of the filmmaking apparatus in record time, to revolutionise the movie musical with *Cabaret* (1972). Wasson contextualises Fosse's journey against a history of the changes in the musical theatre and film industries, and culture at large. Cynical, sinuous, sexy Fosse was at odds with the 1950s, right on time for the late 60s and 70s, and sadly out of step with the 80s – his last Broadway production and first flop in ages, *Big Deal*, was hurried out to make room for *Les Misérables*.

Along the way we get deft thumbnail sketches of various figures in Fosse's professional and personal lives – lives that are mostly interchangeable, for he was an infamous workaholic fuelled by pharmaceuticals and an insecurity that could never be relieved. Major players include the writer Paddy Chayefsky, Fosse's dear friend of more than 20 years (a "fiery, funny, rabbinical grizzly bear... like Tevye by way of Sky Masterson"), and the legendary New



Let's dance: Bob Fosse with Shirley MacLaine rehearsing *Sweet Charity*

York agent Sam Cohn, a creature belonging to a distinctively East Coast creative culture, since extinct, that breathes again between *Fosse*'s covers. There are also lots and lots of women. There are wives and girlfriends – among them invaluable collaborators such as Gwen Verdon and Ann Reinking – as well as flings and various come-ons that don't quite come off. But while we count off Fosse's conquests and his successes across various media, Fosse's apparent inability to enjoy the fruits of his labour is ever before the reader.

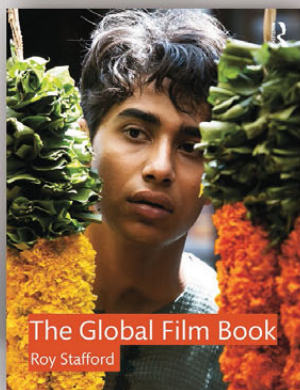
Fosse loved show business. He hated it. He didn't know anything beyond it. It was his *métier*, but also the subject of his work – and work was everything. Wasson emphasises the attrition of long hours, the sheer toil behind any creative endeavour, the life of trial and mostly error. On Fosse's friend Neil Simon, writing the book for *Sweet Charity*: "[He] knew how to fail and recover, and working at top speed, he could fail faster than most. He was a pro." Of *Cabaret* and *Chicago*'s songwriting team: "[They] wrote fast and tore up fast, which gave Kander and Ebb permission to dislike just about anything they wrote." Of Fosse himself: "Ideas did not ever simply come to him; he had to force them out."

It's the story of a man determined to use himself up, each page-turn accompanied by an audible rattle of sand from the hourglass

Wasson's readings of Fosse's finished works are astute, and he provides extensive backstage and on-set reportage, describing Fosse's open auditions and callbacks, his shuttling between rehearsal studio and editing suite, "micromanaging bodies and frames of film", always in the service of elusive perfection. Describing a directorial method that included manipulation, flirtation and scapegoating, Wasson shows a nice touch with group psychology. (Particularly interesting are Fosse's vivid directions to dancers: "[He] always told us to make believe we had blood all over our hands and like we were trying to wipe it off on a wall, kind of like the way the Manson family did.")

Fosse was a harsh taskmaster, but there are few really critical voices recorded here, unless you count Stephen Sondheim's faint praise. The reader hoping for a disproportionate emphasis on Fosse's films will perhaps be disappointed – but these are minor quibbles. Recreating telling vignettes from Fosse's life in fluid firsthand prose, *Fosse* achieves such proximity to its subject that it can be a genuinely harrowing read – something one doesn't usually expect from entertainment biography. It's the story of a man determined to use himself up, each page-turn accompanied by an audible rattle of sand from the hourglass. An interviewee recalls seeing Fosse rehearsing late through a studio window: "There was only one man on Broadway with that silhouette. There was only one man that obsessed." Sparing nothing in seeking the superlative, *Fosse* befits its driven, monomaniacal subject. **S**

Read

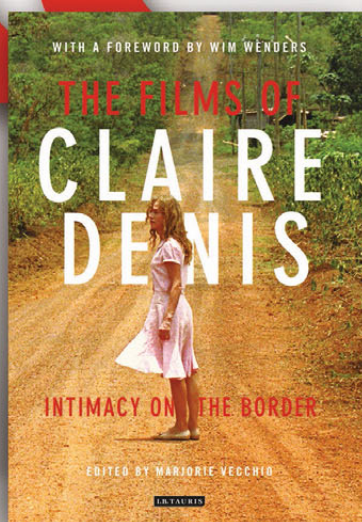


THE GLOBAL FILM BOOK

By Roy Stafford, Routledge, 368pp, paperback, £29.99, ISBN 9780415688970

In this accessible and entertaining exploration of global film, Roy Stafford combines detailed studies of indigenous film and television cultures to introduce readers to the rich and varied cinematic landscapes beyond Hollywood. He examines film production modes around the world and the ways in which they combine and overlap within a dynamic global film market, including examples from Nollywood to Korean cinema, to *telenovelas* and Nordic crime drama. Highlighting areas of difference and similarity in film economies and audiences, as well as form, genre and narrative, this book considers up-to-date industry examples from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australasia and Latin America.

www.routledge.com/u/globalfilm

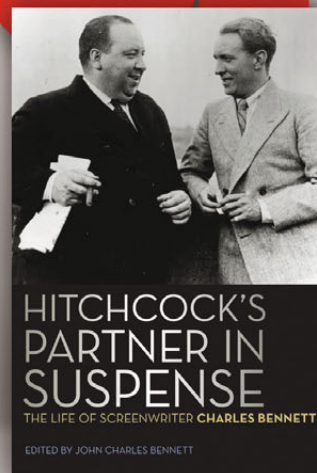


THE FILMS OF CLAIRE DENIS

Intimacy on the Border

Edited by Marjorie Vecchio, Foreword by Wim Wenders, I.B. Tauris, paperback, 288pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781848859548
The films of Claire Denis, one of the most challenging and respected of contemporary filmmakers, probe the psyche of global citizenship, tracing the borderlines of family, desire, nationality and power. With subtlety, depth and at times minimalism and abstraction, her films – including *Chocolat*, *Beau travail* and *White Material* – explore connections between national experience and individual circumstance, visualising the complications of such dualities. Following a foreword by Wim Wenders, with whom Denis worked prior to making her own movies, international contributors explore the themes she addresses in her films, such as kinship and landscape, neo-colonialism and New French Extremity.

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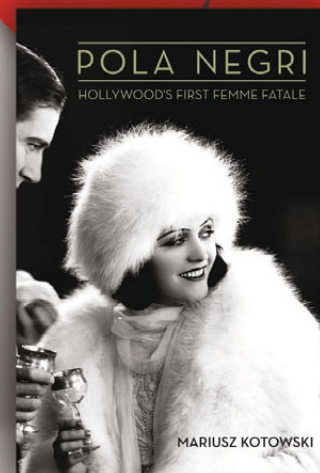


HITCHCOCK'S PARTNER IN SUSPENSE

The Life of Screenwriter Charles Bennett

Edited By John Charles Bennett, University Press of Kentucky, 328pp, illustrated, hardback, £29.95, ISBN 9780813144498
With a career that spanned the history of cinema from the silent era to the 1990s, British screenwriter Charles Bennett (1899–1995) is best remembered for his commercially and critically acclaimed collaborations with Alfred Hitchcock. The fruitful partnership with Hitchcock began with *Blackmail* (1929), the first British sound film, and continued with thrillers such as *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) and *The 39 Steps* (1935). His work in both England and Hollywood left him with many amusing anecdotes, opinions about his craft, and impressions of the famous people he knew, making this memoir a fascinating and insightful read.

<http://goo.gl/MbFqkL>



POLA NEGRI

Hollywood's First Femme Fatale

By Mariusz Kotowski, University Press of Kentucky, 320pp, illustrated, hardback, £29.95, ISBN 9780813144887

Pola Negri, Hollywood's original Jezebel, began her acting career in Germany under legendary directors Max Reinhardt and Ernst Lubitsch, and eventually went to Hollywood, where she became known for her alluring sexuality and biting artistic edge. Starring in more than 60 films, Negri defined the image of the cinematic femme fatale. Author Mariusz Kotowski also illuminates the star's dramatic personal life and numerous affairs — including her romance with Rudolph Valentino and engagement to Charlie Chaplin. *Pola Negri* explores the link between Hollywood and European cinema during the interwar years, and chronicles the story of one of silent cinema's most captivating stars.

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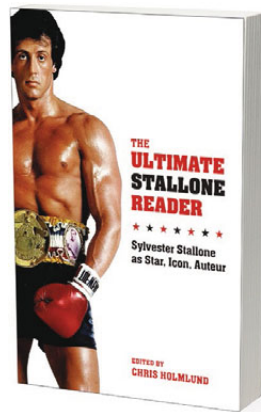
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READERS' LETTERS

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CRITICAL POINTS

Mark Cousins is to be applauded for his rallying cry on the progressive value of criticism ('Situation critical', *S&S*, February) – perhaps because of the visionless inclusive nature of our digital age, critical discourse becomes too easily subjugated by a 'like' button. Yet I found that the image he presents of criticism's shape – and indeed function – is rather unclear. There seems to be some support for the view that criticism, if properly achieved, must take up some opposing viewpoint or stance: "The text should criticise the world for its faults..." This, to me, is the same populist view espoused in the self-aware uncritical writing of our tabloid press, that criticism should take up such-and-such a position in opposition to or in support of a particular world-view. I find a simpler and more useful position in Adorno's understanding: a critic ought not to set out to put the world to rights, but to reflect the character of those rights in their retelling of an experience.

Chris Manley Bracknell

BOX FRESH

Might I suggest that *Sight & Sound* begins to give more than a passing nod to television coverage? While I appreciated last September's feature on small screen crossovers, in the grander scheme it seemed little more than a cursory glance at a trend that is here to stay.

Good as it was to see mention in end of year lists of Jane Campion's remarkable *Top of the Lake* – which, as Mark Cousins noted, blurred the line between screen forms – where was the feature or the discussion it deserved?

Elsewhere, I feel almost ashamed to say that the conclusion of *Breaking Bad* left me as emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically devastated as Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*: this was screen storytelling of the highest calibre.

More recently, *House of Cards* is one of the most cinematic feasts of screen storytelling I have seen this year, in or out of a cinema. Its dazzling cinematography, shot direction, performances and writing quality were of such a standard that I again wondered why it was not being discussed in *S&S*. *House of Cards* arguably achieves cinematic literary *noir* with more success than films like *The Counsellor*, through its greater ability to dramatise both speech and action.

We buy *S&S* for its finger-on-the-pulse address to screen discourse, so leaving TV out of the equation seems increasingly disingenuous. Somehow the fence between the two is starting to seem more and more discursive, and less and less real.

John Tait by email

MIRROR, MIRROR

Watching Scarlett Johansson's victims being lured into the black stuff in *Under the Skin* ('Unearthly stranger', *S&S*, April) reminded me of Orphée's journey to the underworld through a dissolving mirror in Jean Cocteau's 1950 film. (In that pre-CGI era Cocteau is

LETTER OF THE MONTH ATTENTION MUST BE PAID



We should never be riled by Mark Cousins – he may be a location and celebrity junkie but he has the visionary instincts.

He is like a child caught in wonder whose only fault perhaps, is that he needs to insert himself into history as it rushes past. Really, he trusts those intimations of immortality and the ultimate irrelevance of chronological time.

Telluride ('Colorado dreaming', *S&S*, November 2013), for example: he need not have actually been there to write his report; he could have imagined it from the guest list, from location photographs and a crib from guidebooks. But equally his excited astonishment brings its essential nature to life. That all those marvellous serendipities happened to him there does not matter – they can happen anywhere for those with the right habit of seeing.

As his Telluride report might encourage

us to look again at *Portrait of Jennie* (1948), so his television introductions, many years ago, encouraged viewers to see the films in the way that all worthy art should be seen – as revelation and not as entertainment. Enthusiastically he helped Nicholas Ray's *On Dangerous Ground* (1951) shoulder aside its supposed flaws. What do they matter in the light of what it was reaching for?

So if anyone out there reading his column 'Dispatches' and lacking the opportunities he parades ever feels irritated, the essential thing to remember is that all our lives can be like that if we only pay attention. We don't need the exotic locations or the chains of celebrities.

Mark Cousins is a sort of Peter Pan... and long may he stay that way. Every month we should allow ourselves to forget the flaws and be inspired by his latest train set!

Lawrence Freiesleben By email

reported to have used liquid mercury to achieve his effects.) Both films also feature sinister motorcyclists, those in *Orphée* being marginally more benign, in that they don't harvest body parts but merely act as Death's escorts.

Terry Hanstock Nottingham

DROP ZONE

Richard Ayode's exhaustive list of cultural influences ('Me, myself and him', *S&S*, April) was enjoyable. But how come he didn't get round to mentioning Walter Benjamin, Denis Diderot, Béla Tarr, Agnès Varda or Dr. Dre? I guess constraints on space meant those names got dropped. Or rather, didn't.

Janet Bilston Leicester

NECESSARY FLARE

Reading your preview of 'Flare', the renamed London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival ('Flare path', *S&S*, April), I wondered at first why, when films like *Stranger by the Lake* and *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* regularly become

arthouse hits, we need such a ghetto for self-consciously 'gay' cinema at all. My doubts were reinforced by your review in the same issue of *G.B.F.*, a mainstream American comedy about a high school student who comes out and sees his popularity "skyrocket".

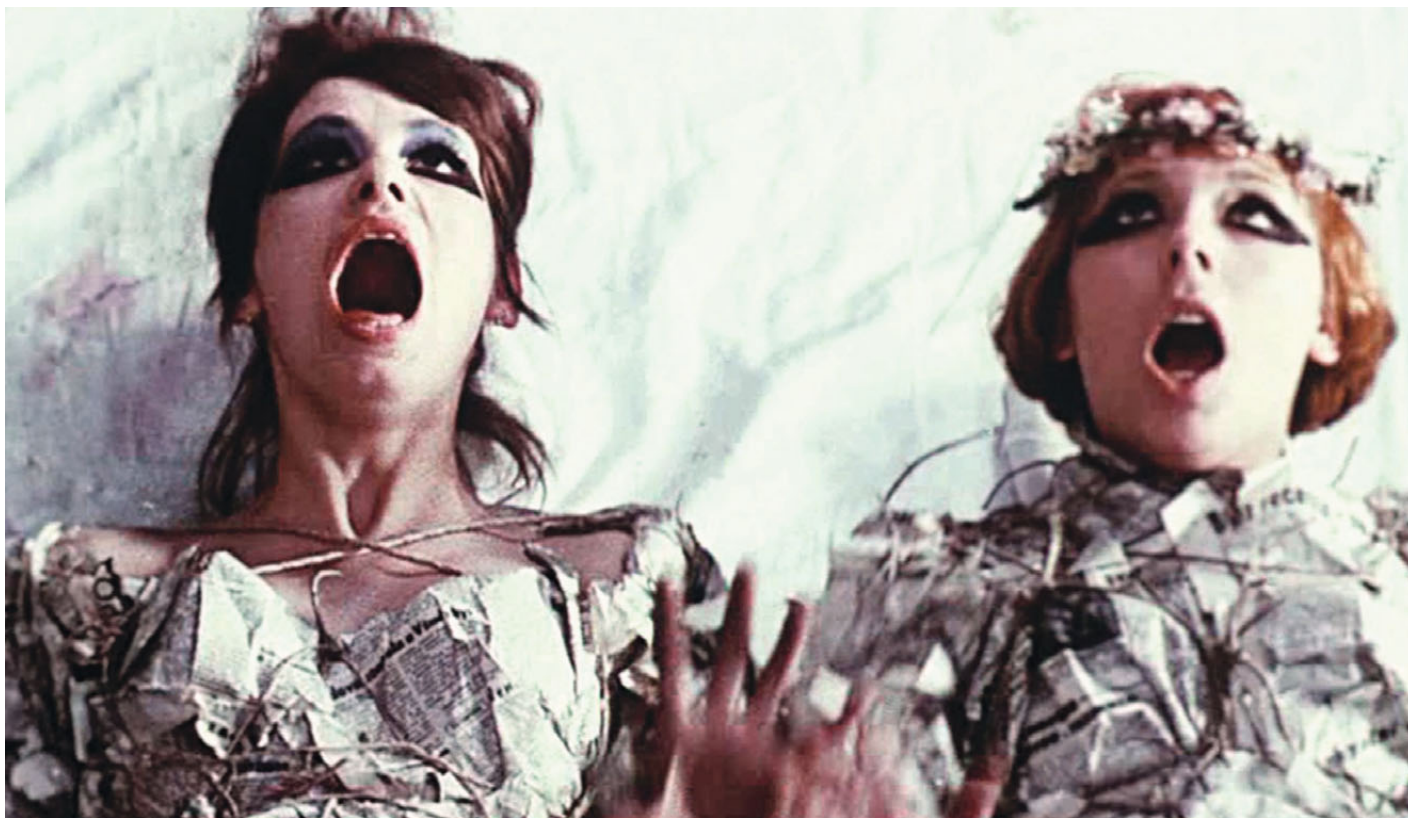
Then I went to see *Dallas Buyers Club*, a film about Aids in the 1980s which turns a straight homophobe into a hero and won an Oscar for a straight actor being brave enough to play a transsexual: I stand corrected.

Russell Archer Pinner

Additions and corrections

April p.77 *The Lego Movie*, © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (USA, Canada, Bahamas & Bermuda) © Village Roadshow Films (BVI) Limited (all other territories), USA/Australia/Denmark 2014; p.78 *The Machine*, Cert 15, 90m 30s, 8,145 ft +0 frames; p.81 *Need for Speed*: some screenings in 3D; p.81 *Paranoidia*, Cert 12A, 105m 44s, 9,516 ft +0 frames; p.62 *Salvo* Cert 12A, 109m 45s, 9,877 ft +8 frames; p.88 *Tom at the Farm* Cert 15, 102m 50s, 9,255 ft +0 frames; p.89 *Under the Skin*, Scarlett Johansson's character is unnamed; p.64 *The Unknown Known: The Rules and Memos of Donald Rumsfeld*, Cert 12A, 102m 50s, 9,255 ft +0 frames; p.91 *Winter's Tale*, © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (USA, Canada, Bahamas & Bermuda) © Village Roadshow Films (BVI) Limited (all other territories), USA/Australia 2014, UK theatrical title *A New Year Winter's Tale*, US theatrical title *Winter's Tale*.

DAISIES



One of the Prague Spring's most irreverent flowerings, *Daisies* lets its anarchic, psychedelic tendencies play themselves out with a bang

By Carmen Gray

The legacy of Věra Chytilová, who died in March, is her vibrant, radical spirit of dissent, which is the very essence of her defining film, *Daisies* (1966). It ends in a playful carnival of destruction as giggling accomplices Marie I and Marie II (non-professionals Jitka Cerhová and Ivana Karbanová) sneak into a banquet hall and lay waste to a feast. They knock back Johnnie Walker, smash glasses and cat-walk in heels through platefuls of food before scrambling up to swing on a huge crystal chandelier.

One of the most formally daring films of the Czech New Wave, *Daisies* was made during the brief window for flourishing innovation that opened in Communist Czechoslovakia before 1968 when Soviet tanks rolled in to crush the Prague Spring and creative freedom was again stifled. Chytilová's second feature after *Something Different* (1963), which had contrasted the lives of a gymnast and a housewife, *Daisies* was banned by the authorities, who then made it very difficult for her to work for the next decade.

Explosively unpredictable and irreverent, *Daisies* was everything the regime despised. They singled out the decadent wastage of food as particularly reprehensible. Of course, the two Maries are not just frivolous teens acting out. The stakes are high in their anarchic acts as they mock a power structure that's rotten at its core. The banquet was surely for high-ranking party

officials – the hypocritical, privileged elite. In a satirical barb calling out their greater corruption, an end-title dedicates the film “to all those whose sole source of indignation is a trampled-on trifle”.

The devastation of the banquet is the grand finale of the havoc wrought by the women throughout the film. At the beginning, they'd sat side by side, their joints creaking like dolls, and agreed that since the world had gone bad they'd be bad too. In a typical prank, one friend crashes the other's date with a much older sugar daddy and orders gluttonous amounts from the restaurant menu before they abandon him at the train station, thwarting his tacit expectation of sex. They lie about idly in their apartment, cutting up phallic-shaped foods, and even question the strictures of language itself by suggesting they change words' arbitrary meanings. A surreal torrent of tinted filters, stylistic ruptures and dynamic movement, the film's very form bursts with anything-goes spontaneity.

From atop the chandelier, a cross-cut sees the young women floundering in a lake at the end of poles, as if dunked for witchcraft. They shout their remorse. “It had to end like this,” is typed out across the screen. Suddenly back in the banquet hall, they recite vows like robots to be hard-working. Reverting to the doll-like automata they were at the beginning, they rearrange the broken crockery into an ineffectual parody of order before lying side by side to mechanically

Explosively unpredictable, 'Daisies' was everything the regime despised, mocking a power structure that's rotten at its core

declare their happiness. In a flash of psychedelic colour, the chandelier crashes down on them.

An exact meaning to the violent deaths of Marie I and II, who operate in a vacuum without discernible family ties or past, is hard to pin down. But that's kind of the point. Chytilová was a director who seemed to glimpse freedom in the joyous slippage of destabilisation. Like a Dadaist, she goes all the way in rejecting false platitudes, the ending an inversion of the bright utopian future Socialist Realism emptily promised for heroes of developed political consciousness. The very last shots, which echo the first, are archival footage of bombs exploding and the gunfire of fighter planes. This framing device sets the pair's anarchic behaviour within the nihilism of modern warfare, as a refusal to be complicit in a state killing machine enabled through mindless obedient decorum.

Daisies has continued to divide reactions, with some recoiling from Marie I and II as deplorable brats. Of course, loose-cannon subversion by women with no malleable eagerness to simmer and please is profoundly frightening for many. Chytilová herself has been painted as a prickly character, arrogant, inflexible or crazy – traits that would be shrugged off as part and parcel of the temperament of a prodigiously talented male director. She was the only female in her class at Prague's famed FAMU film school; to become a notable director in a deeply chauvinistic industry, flinty obstinacy must have been requisite. Chytilová rejected the label 'feminist', instead deeming herself an 'individual' and insisting that if you don't believe in a set of rules it's up to you to break them. **S**

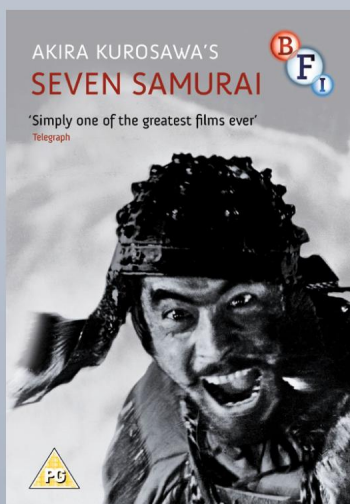


For an obituary of Věra Chytilová go to bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

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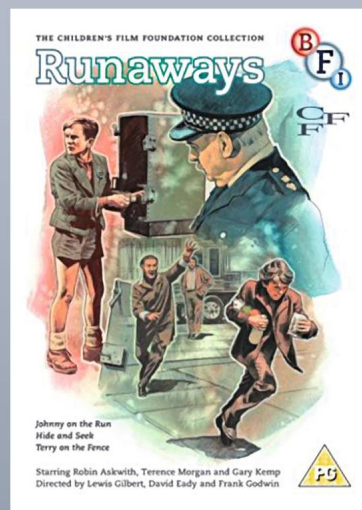


SEVEN SAMURAI

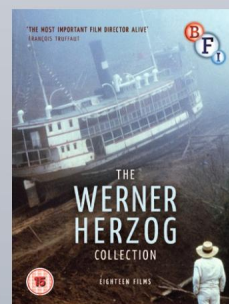
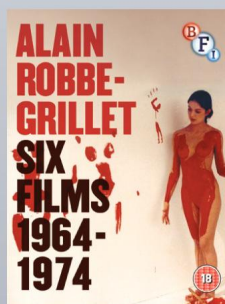
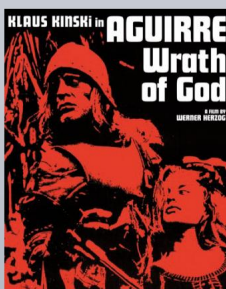
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A STUDIO GHIBLI FILM

THE WIND RISES

ORIGINAL STORY, SCREENPLAY AND DIRECTED BY HAYAO MIYAZAKI MUSIC BY JOE HISAISHI THEME SONG "YOUNG GEMINI" PERFORMED BY YUMI KAWA
STUDIO GHIBLI NIPPON TELEVISION NETWORK, DENTSU, JAKUHOODO DYNAP, WALT DISNEY JAPAN, MITSUBISHI, TOHO, AND KODAI PRESENT A STUDIO GHIBLI PRODUCTION "THE WIND RISES"
STUDIOCANAL ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC ANIMAPARC
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IN CINEMAS MAY 9

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